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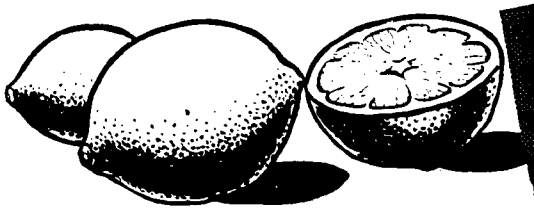

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Volume 277 CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 6, 1937 Number 2

Pacific Passage—*First of five parts*.....Allan Vaughan Elston 6
South toward Pago Pago, mystery grasps the wheel of the liner Monterey

Legends of the Legionaries—*Picture Feature*.....W. A. Windas 29
Lexicon of the Fighting-Men

Main Line West—*Complete Novelet*.....Philip Ketchum 30
Once brave men dreamed these cities in the wilderness

Winter Flight—*Short Story*.....Jack Rogers Beehan 56
At sixteen thousand feet and thirty degrees below, a pilot's heart thaws

Pearls—*Complete Novelet*.....Sinclair Gluck 66
A temple in the sea lures Dan Brice to tragedy

Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 90
Eugene Bullard—War Ace

Tiger on Parade—*Third of five parts*.....Judson P. Philips 91
To take a Princeton Omelette, you have to do more than break an egg

Governor's Escort—*Short Story*.....Henry F. Church 105
The man on the motorbike turned inside out—by an expert

Old Gus Takes Over—*Short Story*.....Bertrand L. Shurtleff 111
Ten t'ousan' Svedes yoomped out of da veeds to sail the good ship "Boma"

Sable—*Conclusion*.....Frank Richardson Pierce 123
The only realistic camera shot Kupoff missed was the one of Kupoff dying

Argonotes 141

Looking Ahead! 143

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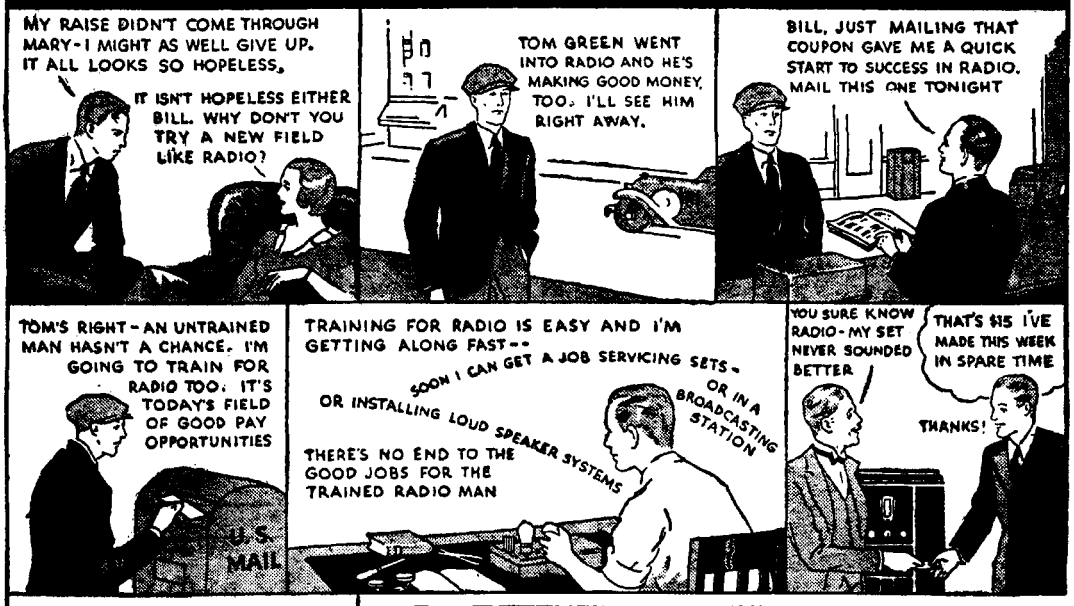
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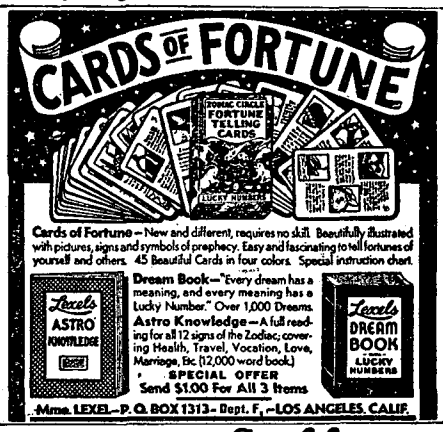
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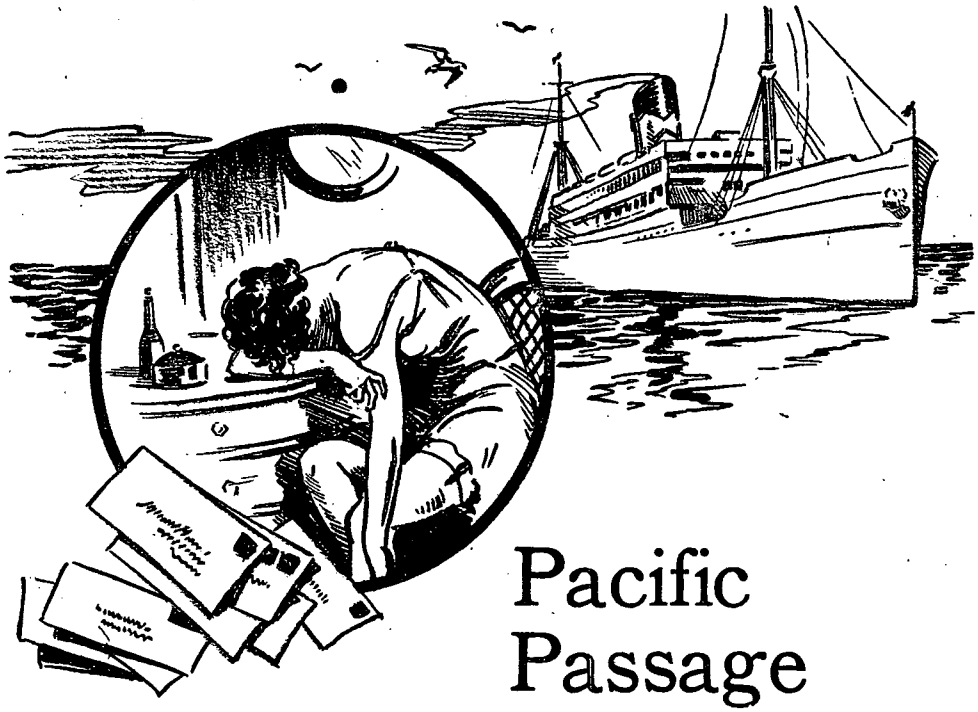

Pacific Passage

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

Author of "Copra," "The Howling Wilderness," etc.

CHAPTER I

DEATH AT THE GANGPLANK

THE stringed orchestra on the wharf balcony had played "Aloha" many times. Although the hour of sailing was four and it was now nearly five by the dock-tower clock, and although a mass of Honolulu citizenry was becoming fatigued at waving goodbye to *lei*-laden passengers of the *Monterey,* still the ship did not go. She was being held for the arrival of Otis Pope.

"He's overdue on the China Clipper, Miss," explained a deck steward. "Sailed with us plenty of times, Mr Pope has."

"Who," inquired a rather plain girl from the American Midwest, "is Mr. Pope?"

The deck steward arched surprised and thoroughly sophisticated eyebrows. "You don't know who Otis Pope is, Miss?" His tone in referring to the Matson Line's tardy client was definitely respectful.

Laura Gilman smiled in self-deprecation. "I'm shockingly ignorant," she admitted. "Is he an ambassador, or somebody?"

Response came from a pale, thin man with sparse, reddish hair parted far down on one side. Laura knew him as Boris Getman, an attorney. "He's *somebody,*" Getman said, "or they wouldn't be holding up a twenty-five thousand ton liner. Imagine keeping seven hundred of us waiting here in a sweat, just for one man!"

The wharf orchestra again struck up "Aloha."

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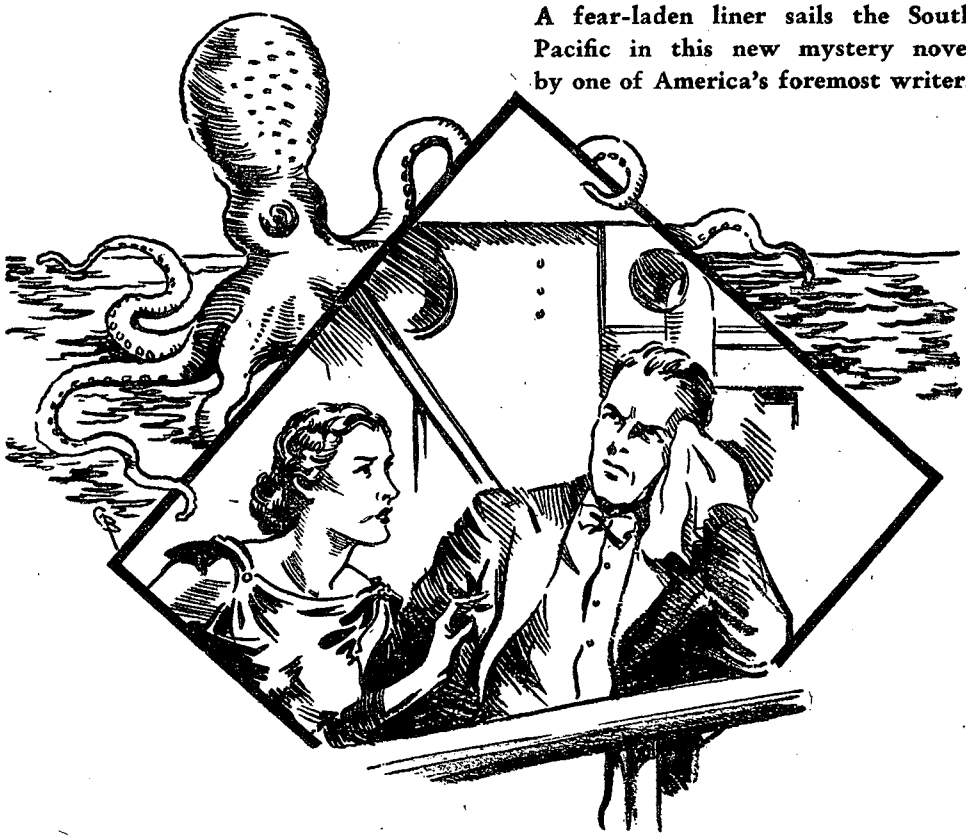

"There he comes!" exclaimed voices presently.

And Laura Gilman, at the rail of A deck, leaned outward amidst a tangle of streamers to observe the belated approach of Mr. Otis Pope. Pope was striding swiftly through the wharf house with the crowd parting before him, and with a dozen or more gardenia *leis* ringed about his broad shoulders. Six-feet-two and a clean two hundred pounds, rosily handsome, Otis Pope on his march to the gangplank could hardly fail to attract every eye at the rails. "Hello, Mr. Pope!"—"Aloha"—"This is one boat you almost missed, Otis."

It seemed to Laura that everyone here at this cross-road of Pacific travel knew Otis Pope. That is, everyone but herself. Now, as he crossed the wharf with a long-robed Chinese secretary at his heels and robust Kanaka porters keeping pace with lavish-labeled baggage, Laura wasn't the only girl at the rail who gave quick, deft arrangement to her hair and patted powder to a shiny spot on her nose. "Isn't he gorgeous!" exclaimed Laura to Boris Getman, then became aware that Getman had withdrawn from the rail at her elbow. His place was now taken by an elderly and somewhat pedantic Britisher, Asa Ashurst.

"Pope's a distinguished cosmopolite, Mrs. Royer," Ashurst was remarking to a large, blonde lady on his left. "A man constantly a-travel to far and silent places."

"A mining engineer, isn't he?" Mrs.

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Royer, a widow, looked downward with experienced appreciation as Pope came nearer. She observed with approval the immaculate sheen of his white pongees. She saw wavy brown hair, for Otis Pope on no occasion wore cap or helmet. The hair was parted in the middle and was just a bit gray at the temples. His forehead was high and sunburned, with a V furrow between friendly brown eyes.

"At the top of the heap," affirmed Ashurst. "Chief consulting engineer for most all the British and Yankee syndicates. Keeps him hopping, too. Africa, Australia, Alaska, Mexico, Chile, everywhere."

"Really?" prompted Mrs. Royer. She looked questioningly at Ashurst who, she understood, was a cocoa-bean buyer, and therefore much on the go himself.

Ashurst nodded with emphasis. "I understand right now he's on the way from Indo-China to Tasmania, with a conference at Suva as we stop there. They say he usually looks a plant over, then either smiles or frowns. If it's a frown, they shut the mine down. If it's a smile, Big Business in London or New York cheerfully comes across with another ten or twenty millions for development."

"How dreadfully influential!"

"Yes. They say Otis Pope once sent a one-word cable, 'No,' from Peru, and the price of copper dropped four cents a pound."

"Marvelous!" murmured Mrs. Royer. "And he seems such a young man, too."

"He's forty-two, I'm told."

"Married, of course?"

"No. Single."

That, thought Laura Gilman with a repressed sigh, did not make Otis Pope less interesting.

WHEN the first officer greeted Pope in E-deck foyer, Pope remembered him at once. "Hello, Larry. Sorry to keep you waiting."

"We'll make it up," promised First Officer Lawrence Corliss. At his brisk order, the gangplank pulleys began to sing. Through a telephone he spoke to Captain Jansenn on the bridge. "Mr. Pope's aboard, sir."

Otis Pope shook hands with the chief purser, calling him by first name. Old shipmates crowded around him, Pope towering half a head above them all. Many were surprised and flattered that he should remember them so well, but Otis Pope's mind had always been a card index. As he exchanged greetings his intellectual Chinese secretary, Dr. Mingo, stood by beaming.

"Lead the way, Eddie," Pope directed a bellboy.

They ascended by elevator to B deck. In B-deck foyer Pope smiled as he recognized a plump stewardess. "I thought you were on the *Mariposa,* Mrs. Murphy."

The woman flushed with pleasure. "I was, Mr. Pope, until two trips ago."

Foyers and corridors were practically deserted. Nearly all the passengers were on deck shouting to friends on the wharf. They were moving now. Pope could feel slow motion as the ship warped outward into the bay.

"This way, please," invited Eddie the bellboy. He led aft along a B-deck corridor toward Suite 125-127-129.

125 and 129 were bedrooms, and 127 was a sitting room in between. There was a trunk room and two baths. When traveling Otis Pope always insisted that his secretary's reservation be no less comfortable than his own. Also, the sitting room would provide them with a convenient office en route to Australia.

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Eddie stopped at the door of 125, which opened on the midship foyer. As the boy was fumbling for his passkey, Dr. Mingo asked quietly, "You are certain this is correct suite?"

"Yes, sir." Eddie's answer was prompt, although he consulted his memorandum of the reservation to make sure.

"It seemed," Dr. Mingo murmured, "that I heard slight movement inside, as though room were already occupied."

"Might be the room steward fixin' things up," Eddie suggested. He unlocked the door and pushed it open.

Otis Pope stepped into an orderly room. Dr. Mingo and the bellboy followed. "I brought your mail up a little while ago, Mr. Pope," Eddie said. "It's on the sitting-room table. And your luggage 'll be along right away."

As Pope slipped a bill into the boy's hand, Dr. Mingo crossed to an interior door. He opened this, exposing room 127 which was equipped with a table, a divan, a writing desk and two overstuffed chairs. Again the Chinese secretary cocked an ear as though attending some faint sound.

His sloping eyes came to rest upon the table, where he failed to see the stack of mail and telegrams which usually awaited Otis Pope whenever he boarded a ship. According to the bellboy, mail had just been placed there. Quickly Mingo crossed the sitting room to the door of his own bedroom, number 128. The cabin, he saw, was orderly. But the exterior door of it, giving upon the central B-deck corridor, stood ajar.

Less than three minutes ago that door had been closed. Dr. Mingo knew as much because he himself, with Otis Pope and the bellboy, had passed by it en route from the forward to the midship foyer. Eddie might have admitted them there, but hadn't, simply because the midship foyer entrance, giving into 125, was the main entrance of the suite.

IT WAS clear that an intruder had just withdrawn via the exit of 129, possibly taking with him various messages addressed to Otis Pope. Mingo sprang like a cat to the open door and looked both ways along the corridor. No one was in sight. Then he called to his employer, who joined him promptly.

"Visitor has retreated," Mingo announced simply. The one imperfection of Mingo's English was an omission of articles.

Pope saw the open door of 129. He turned then to stare significantly at the bare table of 127.

"He has taken letters," Mingo suggested.

"Report it immediately," directed Pope, and the Chinese withdrew to do so.

Pope turned to the bellboy, who was gazing confusedly at the bare table. "How much mail did you put there, Eddie?"

"A stack," Eddie said, "about so high." He held a hand about ten inches off the table.

Pope sat down, and the V between his brown eyes deepened. "Get me a passenger list, Eddie. And send my room steward here at once."

"Yes, sir." The boy skipped out.

Pope sat drumming with his fingers on the arm of the divan, while his mind skimmed actively over certain distressing possibilities. The theft of mail suggested that someone aboard was probing into his affairs. Which of those varied affairs, he wondered, was of interest to the intruder? Did it concern Tasmanian tin, Chilean copper,

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Arizona silver? A stream of secrets had been tapped, a stream flowing from clients in all parts of the world to Otis Pope. Was the thief scouting for some secret of expansion likely to affect a market in metals? Or was the interest purely personal, unrelated to his calling as a metallurgical expert?

Eddie popped in and reported: "I can't find Wilkins, Mr. Pope."

"Wilkins is my room steward?"

"Yes, sir. And say, Mr. Pope, there's trouble of some kind down on C deck. Flock of stewards huddled around a cabin door. The first is there, talking to the skipper, who—"

"Wait a minute," Pope broke in. "The captain ought to be on the bridge, until we drop the pilot."

"Usually he would be," Eddie admitted. "But the first just called him hotfoot down to C deck. I heard the first say maybe we oughta put back to the wharf. And the old man said no, send a message ashore to police, and let a police boat join us at quarantine. We can lie to there, he says, until the police decide what to do."

"Does it have any connection," Pope asked, "with a theft of mail from this suite?"

Before Eddie could answer, Dr. Mingo came softly into the room. His round face was placid, but his narrow black eyes were unusually bright. "I am unable to speak with first officer," the Chinese reported. "At present he occupies himself with captain, about commotion more disturbing than our own. So I left word of our loss at purser's desk and returned here."

As Mingo finished speaking, First Officer Corliss came rushing in. His face, usually quite red, was now pale. "Someone knocked over your room steward, Mr. Pope, in an unused cabin on C deck."

"And took his pass key?" Pope prompted.

"And took his pass key."

"Did Wilkins see his assailant?"

"Wilkins," Corliss announced, "is dead."

OTIS POPE stood up. Then, in a mirror across the room, he saw the reflection of aloha garlands which still draped his broad shoulders. Now they seemed incongruous and Pope took them off one by one to drop them to the floor.

"Why," he asked quietly of Corliss, "do you come so promptly here?"

"Because of a report that your mail has been stolen. Wilkins having been your room steward, there may be a connection."

"There *must* be a connection," Pope agreed. He turned to his secretary. "Take a telegram, Dr. Mingo."

As Mingo produced a pad and pencil, the engineer dictated:

> Honolulu mail stolen. If anything vital from your quarter, repeat by wireless.
>
> Pope.

"To each of our important clients?" suggested Mingo.

Pope nodded. "To Hagerheim at New York, Basset at London, Hellmann at Chuquicamata, Carden at Cerro del Pasco, and to anyone else who might send us a confidential communication. You can hand the wires to the pilot when he leaves at quarantine, for Honolulu filing."

First Officer Corliss produced a cigarette and lighted it nervously. "The old man's throwing duck fits," he said. "He's afraid this'll hold us up. We sent for a police boat, of course."

"And the police may insist on your turning back to the wharf!"

Corliss gave a wry nod. "Which would knock our schedule into a cocked

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hat. Lord knows how many hours or days it'll take to find out who did it. So the old man'll ask the police to give a quick look at the crime, then take the body back to shore with 'em. They can leave one police officer aboard till we get to Pago Pago. That's five days. By then he ought to have his man nailed. He can get off with him at Pago and bring him back on the next boat."

"It's almost certain," Pope said with deep concentration, "that whoever stole my mail killed Wilkins. Presumably he saw the bellboy deliver it here. Dr. Mingo and I only missed him by a minute. In fact, Dr. Mingo actually heard him prowling in 127 as we entered 125."

"But who is he?" Corliss worried. "We've got a thousand human beings on this ship, counting the crew."

"I'll go over the passenger list," Pope said, "and see if it suggests someone with an interest in my affairs."

"Here it is, sir."

Before looking through it Pope moved to a window. This was not a porthole, but a shuttered sash window giving upon B-deck promenade. At the rail out there he could see a long line of passengers who were still waving to friends on the receding wharf. Gaily they were tossing their *leis* into the sea.

The guilty man himself was among them, thought Pope, or else sulking in his cabin. What fear must descend upon the rest when they learned that a murderer was aboard—with a key to every door on the ship!

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL IN GREEN

THE plain girl from the Midwest, Laura Gilman, was still lingering at A-deck rail. One by one those near her withdrew, some to the bar or smoking room for evening cocktails and others to their cabins to dress for dinner. But Laura Gilman was a romantic girl and this was the first time in her life she had ever sailed away from a place like Honolulu. So she remained at the rail, bewitched, watching the pinkness of sunset take fantastic shape over receding, tropic mountains.

A tugboat was keeping pace as they slipped slowly out of the harbor. She had heard someone say that it was a pilot boat and the liner would stop a little way out to take off the pilot. Now Laura saw another small boat, a launch, coming swiftly in their wake. Uniformed men were in it. A siren sounded as the launch caught up and disappeared in a careening flight around the bow of the *Monterey*.

Laura took off her *lei*, kissed it, threw it into the sea. It would float back to shore, they said, as an omen that you yourself would some day return to that land of flowers. She hoped no one guessed she had bought her own *lei* from a wharf peddler. Laura hadn't wanted to be the only one to come aboard without one. It seemed to her that everyone else had been met by friends upon arrival this morning, and this afternoon had been escorted back to the ship amid a shower of brilliant blossoms.

Laura Gilman, though, had no friends closer than Iowa. Except of course the nice Australian girl who shared a cabin with her. The Australian girl, June Darrow, was lovely and popular, and had spent the day ashore with the ever-attentive Mr. Ladislaw. But Laura herself had wandered alone from shop to shop, returning unattended to the ship.

Now, looking down a little wistfully

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at her self-bought *lei* as it floated away, she saw what at first she thought were other flowers being thrown from a porthole. Then she observed they were not flowers, but scraps of white and yellow paper. Torn bits of letters, they seemed to be. Laura leaned further over the rail and saw a hand and arm extended through a porthole several decks below her. Without attaching any importance to it, she noticed which porthole it was in relation to certain partition lines of the ship.

The extended arm down there released another handful of paper scraps, and these fluttered to the water to float beside Laura's discarded *lei*. One of the papers was a yellow rectangle, Laura noted. It looked like the envelope of a telegram. Some steward was cleaning up a cabin, she thought, getting rid of rubbish left by a passenger who had disembarked at Honolulu. But no, stewards wore white coats and this arm was bare. There was a slight, reddish ring or scar around the wrist, as though the person had once worn a wrist watch strap too tightly.

Laura looked at her own watch. It was six o'clock—time she went below to dress for dinner. She felt tempted, however, to skip dressing for dinner tonight, in order to remain longer at the rail. One didn't really have to dress, she had heard, on the first evening out of any large port.

Then she noticed they were slowing to a stop just out of the harbor. To let the pilot off, of course. She decided to stay and watch the pilot boat go back to shore.

AN ELEVATOR stopped at B-deck's midship foyer, and Otis Pope entered the cage with Dr. Mingo and First Officer Corliss.

"C deck, please," Pope said.

While the cage was descending one floor, Corliss addressed the elevator boy. "Have you seen anything unusual in the last hour, Briggs?"

"Me? No, sir, Mr. Corliss. But I just came on duty at six o'clock. This is my first trip up and down."

Disembarking at C deck, Pope, Corliss and Mingo were joined by a trio of Honolulu police officers who had just come aboard from a launch. Two of the officers were American born and in uniform; a third, in plain clothes, was a Hawaiian. The oldest of the trio was Chief of Police Beckman, a lynx-eyed veteran whom Pope had known for many years.

"Any angles, Mr. Pope?" Beckman asked sharply without even a greeting.

"Stack of my mail was stolen, that's all," Pope answered as the group followed Corliss down a C-deck corridor.

Captain Eric Jansenn was pacing impatiently in front of cabin 250.

"No sense holding us up, is there, Chief?" he began in a pleading tone as Beckman came up. "We've got a schedule, you know, and contracts of transportation to fulfill with seven hundred passengers."

With Captain Jansenn, his schedule always came first. Next to that came the peace and comfort of his passengers. Now his rugged face was lined with anxiety as he stepped aside to permit Chief Beckman to enter cabin 250.

The body of Room Steward Wilkins lay as it had been found. One of two aluminum water carafes lay on the floor. The other carafe was in its bracket. The spread had been partly pulled off of Bed A. Otherwise the cabin was in order.

"Wilkins always carried his pass key on a chain hooked at his belt," Jansenn said. "We noticed right away that it was gone."

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"Shoot the crime, Joe," Beckman directed.

Joe, the slightest of the three officers, had a police camera. He set it up and took a flashlight picture of the cabin.

"Might have used the carafe to hit him with," Beckman guessed. "Look it over for fingerprints, Sergeant Honuapo."

As Detective Sergeant Honuapo began a careful examination of the carafe, Otis Pope suggested to Beckman: "It seems to be polished smoothly. Possibly that explains the disarranged bedspread. After the assault, the man perhaps used the spread to wipe away prints."

With a grimace, Beckman nodded. "Then he helped himself to the victim's pass key. Used it to enter your room on the next deck. What would he want with your mail, Mr. Pope?"

"Can't say," Pope answered. "He might have been tapping some confidential information, from one of many possible sources."

Captain Jansenn broke in with exasperation. "Look here, you're not going to hold me up for a couple of weeks, are you?"

"Homicides like this," Beckman protested, "aren't solved in a wink."

"That's just it," Jansenn argued. "Any one of a thousand people might have done it. So why not let one of your men ride with us to Samoa? He can have complete charge. All I want is to get going, full steam ahead, for Pago Pago."

BECKMAN, bending over to examine the wound on Wilkins' head, said noncommittally: "He was hit with a blunt instrument, such as this carafe. Skull fractured. Crime probably took place while you were still alongside the wharf. Which means that I can make you put back there, if I choose."

Jansenn became frantic. "But you wouldn't do me that way, would you, Chief?"

"No, I won't." Beckman stood up, his face relaxing into a grim smile. "Because for one thing it'd give the criminal a chance to get off the ship. We've got him corralled now, aboard the *Monterey,* and that's where we'd better keep him."

Jansenn showed infinite relief.

"We'll take the body ashore with us, Joe," Beckman announced to the other uniformed officer, "and turn it over to the corner. Sergeant Honuapo, you ride on to Pago Pago and get your man. Bring him back on the next ship north."

Honuapo's wide, swarthy face lighted up at this unexpected prospect of a trip to Samoa. Then he snapped his stocky figure to attention and saluted.

"Mighty decent of you, Chief Beckman," Jansenn said. "And sensible, too. Mr. Corliss, get a detail from the crew, and a tarpaulin. When you take the corpse to the police launch, don't alarm passengers any more than you can help."

Beckman said to Pope, "Is there anything more I ought to know about the theft of your mail?"

"There's nothing," Pope answered, "except that Wilkins was steward of my suite, and that the two crimes occurred close together."

"Your suite is on B deck?"

"Yes."

"Then Wilkins wouldn't also be room steward for this C-deck cabin."

Jansenn said: "He was not. Man named Ward is steward of this cabin. I've questioned him. He knows nothing. Ward was in the crew's quarters, taking a nap, from four-thirty to five-

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thirty. Wilkins was seen alive at four-thirty. And at about four-thirty a bellboy took the mail to Mr. Pope's suite."

"Has this cabin been empty all the way from Los Angeles?"

"No. It was occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Z. Ballard from Los Angeles to Honolulu. They disembarked at nine this morning. Ward immediately rearranged the cabin and locked it up."

Beckman made a note of the name. "Do all stewards have pass keys?" he asked.

Jansenn nodded. Dominated by an urge to get the ship under way, he turned to look impatiently down the corridor for Corliss.

Beckman directed Honuapo to go through the dead man's pockets. There was an accumulation of tips, five and one dollar bills. But there was no pass key.

Corliss appeared with a tarpaulin and two sailors. The corpse was then moved for the first time, to be placed on the outspread tarp.

"What's that?" Beckman exclaimed sharply. Otis Pope and the others saw it at the same moment—a neat, square, formally-addressed envelope which lay on the floor, and which until now had been concealed by the body.

Honuapo kneeled for a close look at it. "It is for you, Mr. Pope."

POPE, bending over, saw that the envelope was indeed addressed to himself, in care of the *Monterey* at Honolulu. The postmark was Melbourne, Australia. The address was in longhand. The envelope which was of superior quality, was still sealed and had apparently not been tampered with.

"Parcel of your stolen mail," Beckman presumed. "Leaves no doubt about the connection between the theft and the murder."

With his handkerchief he picked up the letter. "We'd better open it. A bare chance it might give us a lead."

Pope assenting, the police chief opened the missive. From it came an engraved invitation, nothing more. A Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Dow of Melbourne herewith formally invited Mr. Otis Pope to attend the wedding of their daughter, Harriet Dow, to a Mr. Kenneth Spragg, on the fourteenth of the next month in Melbourne.

Beckman's lips drooped in disappointment. "This seems inconsequential," he said. "The Dows are friends of yours, Mr. Pope?"

"The best," Pope said. "Evidently they heard I'm due to pass through Melbourne about the fourteenth, on my way to Tasmania."

"Humph! People of some prominence, I presume?"

Pope nodded. "Clarence Dow is a wealthy man, and his wife is prominent socially in Melbourne. It would be like them to send out at least a hundred invitations to Miss Dow's wedding."

"I'll keep this one," Beckman said, "on a chance of fingerprints." Wrapping it in his handkerchief he put it in his inside pocket. "There was a ten inch stack of mail. Evidently this isn't the particular item which interested the man who took it."

"Our finding it here, though," Pope reminded him, "is important."

"Yes, because it links the crimes."

"It does more than that. It means the theft occurred before the murder."

Beckman agreed thoughtfully. "Right. Until now we assumed the man knocked over Wilkins for his passkey, then used the passkey to steal your mail. Now he appears to have had the mail in hand when he assaulted Wilkins, dropping one unimportant letter in the scuffle."

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"Well, aren't we ever going to get away from here?" fretted Captain Jansenn. "Why can't Honuapo unravel all this after we get going?"

"One more question," insisted Beckman. "Mr. Pope, can you see the name of anyone on the passenger list who might have a motive for spying into your correspondence? Some one, for instance, you know in the mining world?"

"I've looked over the list," Pope said. "A score or more names are familiar, people I've traveled with before. But no name stands out as one I might suspect. I've wired all my principal clients for a check-up. By the way, Dr. Mingo,"—Pope turned to his secretary who had stood unobtrusively in the background all this while—"you handed those wires to the pilot?"

"It is accomplished," Mingo said.

"Very well, Sergeant Honuapo, take charge," Beckman directed. "And don't let me down. I want a conviction by the time you make Pago Pago."

TEN minutes later Chief of Police Beckman and his photographer left the *Monterey* in the police launch, taking with them the tarp-wrapped body of Wilkins. Captain Jansenn in vast relief went to the bridge to make full speed ahead on a course toward American Samoa.

Otis Pope found Honuapo at his elbow. The Hawaiian bowed. He was extremely polite and apologetic. "May I look at your rooms, Mr. Pope? Since the criminal begins work there, it is wise that I do same."

"Come along," Pope invited. With Mingo and Honuapo he ascended to suite 125—129.

"I do not like make you miss dinner hour," Honuapo said.

"Afraid we've already missed it," Pope said. "Anyway there's no time to change clothes, so I'll have coffee and sandwiches sent up here."

Dr. Mingo went to the phone and gave the order. Then he set silently to work unpacking while Otis Pope showed Honuapo through the suite, pointing out the table from which mail had been taken, and the two exterior doors. "Mingo, who has ears like a fox, actually heard the man on his prowl. The fellow went out of 129 as we entered 125. And while we were talking about it, he seems to have gone to C deck and assaulted Wilkins."

"The nature of your present voyage, please?" Honuapo asked politely.

Pope gave him a cigar and took one himself. Then the Hawaiian sat uncomfortably on the edge of his chair while Pope talked of his work. "I'm making three mining property examinations on this round-the-world trip," he said. "One in Indo-China, one in Tasmania, one in South Africa. The first is already done and I'm on the way to the second. Also I'm stopping a few hours at Suva, Fiji, to serve on an arbitration committee, in a matter not connected with mining."

"Someone is at the door," Dr. Mingo announced. He stopped his unpacking long enough to admit Corliss and an elevator boy.

"This is Archie Shaw," the first officer said. "He had duty on the midship elevator up to six o'clock. Tell 'em what you saw, Archie."

"I saw a lady trying to get in here," the boy said.

"Into this suite, please?" Honuapo poised a pencil to make notes.

"Yes, sir. Didn't think it was important, or I'd 've told you about it before. Only got a glimpse of her as my elevator passed this deck."

"When was this?" Pope asked.

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"About an hour before I went off duty," Archie said. "Didn't make any note of the time. Might have been a little more than an hour."

"The elevator shaft," Corliss pointed out, "is right across the foyer from the door of 125."

"You stop at this floor on that trip?" Honuapo asked.

"No," Archie answered. "I'd just had a ring from A deck. When I got up to A, no one was there. That often happens. People ring for the elevator, then get tired waiting and walk down the stairs. So I started back down to E deck, with the cage empty, and only got an eyeful of B-deck foyer as I passed it."

"A woman was knocking at this door?" Pope asked.

"Not knocking. Just standing there with her hand on the knob. She seemed to be listening. Her back was to me and I didn't see her face."

"An elderly woman or a young one?"

"Youngish, I'd say. She had on a green sport dress and no stockings. Her dress was cut kinda low at the back."

"Did she have a key in her hand?"

"I didn't see any, sir."

No amount of prompting could ellicit any more information.

WHEN Corliss left with the boy, Honuapo sat writing studiously in his notebook. In a moment he looked up brightly and said: "I shall find lady who fit this description. But I do not think woman have sufficient strong arm to kill Wilkins."

Pope agreed. "It took a hard rap to crush the steward's skull," he said.

"Perhaps two people in this crime," suggested the Hawaiian. "One man with strong arm and one lady with green dress. . . ."

"And no stockings," Pope finished with a queer laugh. He was not looking at Honuapo but at Dr. Mingo, who had just unpacked a dozen brightly-jacketed books and placed them on the table. "We'll hardly need those this trip, Dr. Mingo," Otis Pope said, and laughed again.

Honuapo looked in puzzlement at the books. They were all mystery novels, the most recent best sellers in that field.

"Dr. Mingo and I always take such reading with us on shipboard," Pope explained. "It's our only pastime. Right, Dr. Mingo?"

The Chinese secretary gave solemn assent.

"It's a game with us," Pope went on, "when we travel at sea. It's our favorite sport. I read as far as chapter ten, then dictate a solution to Dr. Mingo. Dr. Mingo then reads the rest of the book and tells me whether I'm right."

"And Mr. Pope," Mingo inserted gravely, "is always right."

Pope chuckled again. "But this trip we won't need the books. Put them back in the bag, Dr. Mingo. We have the real thing."

Mingo complied. "When human flesh flees," he agreed, "one need not pursue shadows."

CHAPTER III

SEEN IN A MIRROR

CAPTAIN JANSENN was determined that life and the pursuit of happiness on his ship, in spite of the black shadow of crime cast over this particular voyage, should go on as normally as possible. For this first night south out of Honolulu, motion pictures had been scheduled in the first-class lounge. There was to be no disarrangement of this schedule, Jansenn decreed.

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The cinema was due to begin at eight o'clock, and the approach of that hour found passengers filing into the lounge. Most of them came directly from dinner. Ladies were in evening dress, gentlemen in dinner coats. Singly and in pairs they took seats arranged in rows before a white screen.

Many were absorbed with whisperings. A few were definitely uneasy. Uneasy because of a deck rumor which persisted and kept augmenting as it passed from mouth to mouth. This one had seen a uniformed policeman. That one had seen a potentially gruesome exhibit in the shape of a tarp-shrouded figure, being carried off the ship at the stop just outside Honolulu harbor. Another had been asked if she had seen anything unusual in the portside corridor of C deck, just before five o'clock.

"The first officer himself asked me," Laura Gilman said to her cabin mate, June Darrow.

"And had you?" June asked.

"I? No. I stayed up on deck until nearly six-thirty—that's why I didn't have time to change for dinner. The only thing unusual I saw was Mr. Otis Pope, the big mining man. I saw him come aboard. Did you, June? Isn't he magnificent?"

"No man is magnificent, my dear. They're just grown boys . . . Good evening, Mr. Ladislaw." June smiled at Raymond Ladislaw, an American actor on his way to play juvenile leads in Australia, and who was now waiting for her at the lounge entrance.

Ever since leaving San Francisco Ladislaw had attached himself to June, and Laura Gilman, older than June by ten years, didn't quite know whether to approve of him or not. At first glance he was young, and yet from certain angles he showed age. He was good-looking, and yet there was a glossiness to his face and a bella-donna brightness to his eyes which suggested constant massagings and make-ups.

"We'd better hurry if we want any seats," Ladislaw said to both of them. And Laura knew that she herself was included only out of politeness. Mr. Ladislaw was quite mad about June, she knew, and would much prefer to sit with her alone.

But June took her arm and said, "Come along, Laura."

The lights went out just as they took seats in the next-to-last row. Ladislaw sat between them and carried on a whispered conversation with June all through the first reel. Laura didn't mind. She knew she wasn't pretty, like June Darrow was; and of course men liked pretty girls.

There at the rear the lounge was quite dark. The only light was on the screen at front. Some time during the second reel a man took a vacant seat on Laura's left. The row back of her filled up. She couldn't see faces. All she knew was that Ladislaw was on her right and behind him was June Darrow.

An anouncement from the loud speaker came in the middle of the last reel. No lights came on. The screen merely went blank as the loud speaker announced:

"Attention please, ladies and gentlemen. Please do not feel disturbed. However, the ship authorities find themselves in need of coöperation from all passengers."

The voice stopped. In the dark silence which followed for a moment, Laura could sense a sudden tension in the room. She wondered if it were the captain speaking, or the purser, or the first officer. Then the voice continued:

"Important mail has disappeared from the suite of Mr. Otis Pope, on B deck, and the management of the

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ship considers it absolutely imperative that the loss be explained at once. An officer of the Honolulu police is now in the library with Mr. Pope. They ask that if any passenger can contribute information which might help to identify the person who took Mr. Pope's mail, will he or she kindly report it to them in the library. Please bear in mind that *anything,* however trivial, should be reported, if conceivably it might throw any light on this incident."

THE voice stopped and the closing action of the screen play continued. But no one paid much attention to it now. Whispers and exclamations came from all over the lounge.

"I said something was up, didn't I?"

"*Do* find what it's about, Horace."

"Did you notice how the waiters were all so preoccupied and mysterious, during dinner? You could hardly get service at all."

Laura Gilman leaned excitedly across Ladislaw and said to June Darrow: "*I* saw something, June. And since mail was stolen from Mr. Pope, it may be important."

"You, Laura! Don't tell me you're mixed up in a mystery!"

"I saw a man throwing mail from a porthole. He was tearing it up, all sorts of letters and telegrams, like he wanted to get rid of it."

"You did!"

"Yes. Don't *you* think it might be important, Mr. Ladislaw?"

"It might be," Ladislaw said, "if you know *which* porthole."

"Oh, but I do know which porthole."

"Then you'd better run along, Laura," advised June, "and tell your magnificent Mr. Pope."

Of course she should, Laura conceded. For a moment she debated whether or not to ask June to go with her. If she did, Mr. Ladislaw wouldn't like it. Ladislaw wanted her out of the way, she knew, so that he could take June for a stroll on deck.

The lights came on then. Laura rose and made her way to the aisle. The man who had occupied the end seat, on her left, was now gone.

The library gave directly off the lounge, and was on the port side of the ship. Laura saw a number of other people crowding that way. Apparently there were others who had information for the policeman and Mr. Pope. Maybe her own testimony wouldn't be so vital after all.

A gorgeously gowned lady was going in there now. It made Laura realize that she, herself, this evening, looked rather dowdy. Of all evenings, why had she chosen this one to miss dressing for dinner! The dress she wore needed pressing. She wished now she had worn the pink one, the one with the high waist which always made her look slimmer. She had a feeling that her nose was shining, and that altogether she looked a fright.

Mr. Pope was so immaculate. It wouldn't take a minute to run down and pretty up. She could even slip on the pink gown.

So instead of going into the library, Laura passed through the writing room to the midship lobby. Many passengers who had just emerged from the picture show were waiting for the elevator there. Laura walked down three flights to D deck and hurried to cabin 340, which she shared with June Darrow.

Locking the door, she slipped off her dress. After laying out the pink one, she sat down before the mirror and began rearranging her hair.

She was touching lipstick to her lips when she heard a key turning in the

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lock. Laura did not turn around, for she was sure it was June Darrow.

"Is that you, June?" she asked as the door opened.

She saw, then, the reflection of a man. He was coming in like a cat, shoulders hunched. She tried to scream, but couldn't. The mirrored apparition terrorized Laura, for the instant paralyzing the chords of her throat. . . .

CHAPTER IV

DEATH AND NEAR-DEATH

IN THE library on A deck Otis Pope said to Detective Sergeant Honuapo: "That makes three people, all women. All motivated by curiosity. All seeking information without having anything to offer themselves."

"Women of my own race are like that, too," Honuapo conceded in his slow, polite voice. "Here comes another one, Mr. Pope."

Pope looked up, and immediately his brown eyes showed interest. This one wasn't like the others. She was young, and really stunning. English, he guessed, and quite sure of herself. She came to him as though she had something to say.

"I'm June Darrow."

"Won't you sit down, Miss Darrow?" Pope himself was now standing.

"It's not necessary," she said. "I've just remembered that I heard a man call for your post about noon today, at the General Delivery window in Honolulu. I know it wasn't you, or your secretary, because you didn't get in on the China Clipper until after four o'clock."

"No one," Pope said, "was authorized to call for it."

"It was called for, Mr. Pope. I was about fourth in line when this man was at the window. He said: 'Anything for Pope—Mr. Otis Pope?' He repeated the name. That's why I remember it."

"You saw nothing but the back of this man's head?"

"I didn't even see that. How could I, with two other heads in between us?"

Pope turned to Honuapo. "Probably he didn't get anything. But he took a chance and asked, in case my mail was addressed General Delivery Honolulu instead of in care of the *Monterey*."

To the girl Pope said: "Thank you very much, Miss Darrow. It at least proves that the plot to intercept my mail was premeditated."

June smiled. "Sorry I can't tell you more," she said, and turned to go.

Somehow Otis Pope didn't want her to go. "Possibly you can help me on another point," he suggested.

Honuapo broke in brightly: "Yes, please. We look for lady in green dress."

June faced them, faintly amused.

"I was just telling Sergeant Honuapo," Otis Pope said, "that women have a remarkably accurate eye for the way other women dress. Have you been on the *Monterey* all the way from California?"

"M-m." Her form of affirmative made him sure she was British.

"Then possibly you've noticed a lady who sometimes appears on deck in a green sports dress cut low in the back. No stockings."

"We search for this lady," Honuapo explained, "because she paid visit to Mr. Pope's door. It was about the time his mail vanished."

June's mind immediately concentrated on the parade of sports costumes which had passed her deck chair during the last five days. "Was it one-piece or two-piece?" she asked. "Was there a hat or tam to match?"

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Pope and Honuapo looked at each other blankly. "Elevator boy did not say," Honuapo replied meekly.

June ignored him and spoke to Pope. "There are hundreds of women aboard. Practically all of them have sports dresses. About one out of every half dozen would be green. I have a green one myself. And in the tropics hardly any girl wears stockings before six o'clock."

Pope looked so crestfallen that she added quickly: "Did you ask Miss Gilman? Laura's very observing. She's just been in to see you, hasn't she?"

"A Miss Gilman?" Pope asked. "No one by that name has seen us." At the same time he became aware that a tallish man with rather waxen good looks had entered the library and now stood by in an attitude of impatient waiting.

June saw him and said to Pope and Honuapo, "This is Mr. Ladislaw. He was with us. I mean we saw the picture together and Miss Gilman mentioned seeing torn bits of letters being thrown out of some porthole."

Otis Pope asked alertly, "Did she notice which porthole?"

Ladislaw himself answered. "Yes, she said she did notice which porthole."

"She left us in the lounge a little while ago," June said. "We thought of course she'd come right in to tell you about it."

"What time did she see this?"

"It must have been just before dinner. I was with her at dinner, and afterward we came right up to the picture."

"We lost her in the crowd," Ladislaw added, "just as the show broke up."

"She's a bit timid," June said. "Possibly she's waiting in the lounge now." She went to the door and looked into the lounge. Pope and Ladislaw followed.

"I got those snapshots," Ladislaw said to June. June gave no answer. Her eyes were searching the lounge for Laura Gilman.

"Had some kodak snaps developed in Honolulu," Ladislaw explained to Pope. "Mostly of Miss Darrow in the swimming tank and playing shuffleboard. Just went down for the prints, so that she can see how really charming—"

"I don't see Laura," June interrupted.

IN THE lounge, half a dozen Contract games were starting: Mrs. Troyer was at the piano, strumming the keys. Boris Getman was standing beside her, turning pages of music and looking quite bored. In a far corner a group of older men and women were surrounding Madam Garaud, the opera singer, urging her to sing for them.

At a small table Asa Ashurst was seated with a man named Maurice Engle. Ashurst looked past Engle and saw Otis Pope framed in the library door. Evidently he had been discussing Pope for he said in a hoarse whisper to Engle, "There he is now. I traveled with him once before, on the P. and O."

Four ladies at a nearby bridge table turned their heads with quick interest. Their stares remained fixed.

Pope beckoned to the loung steward. "Please page Miss Laura Gilman," he directed, "and ask if she'll come to the library."

The lounge steward moved off. They heard his voice in the smoking room call out: "Miss Gilman. Miss Laura Gilman, please."

Pope, June and Ladislaw stepped back into the library.

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June said, "Maybe she went to her cabin."

"Which cabin is it?" Pope asked.

"Number 340."

As Ladislaw began displaying a sheaf of kodak prints to June, Pope picked up the telephone and asked for room 340. He could hear the phone ringing at the other end. But there was no answer.

Pope hung up worriedly. "She spoke to you about the porthole at dinner?"

"No. During the picture," June answered. "Right after the public announcement. You see, until then there was no reason to think it might be important."

Pope's uneasiness increased.

Honuapo inquired deferentially, "May I ask, please, who was sitting near you?"

"Mr. Ladislaw was between us. We don't know who else was near. The row back of us filled up after the room went dark."

The lounge steward came in to announce: "Miss Gilman doesn't seem to be on A deck, sir."

"Unless she's dancing," suggested June. "Mr. Ladislaw, will you please see if she's dancing?"

Ladislaw looked a little rebellious. Clearly he didn't relish being sent off on an errand—one which made him relinquish June to Otis Pope. However he gave a nod and went aft toward the pavillion.

"And if you'll take Honuapo and me down to the cabin, Miss Darrow," Pope said, "we can check up there."

The three descended to D deck. There June led the way to cabin 340. It was locked. June knocked, calling out, "Laura, are you there?"

Still there was no response. Only an ominous silence. And a premonition of tragedy struck both Pope and the girl as June searched her handbag for the key. "I wish I'd made her stay with us," June said nervously. "But it's all right, of course."

She unlocked the door and pushed it open.

"Oh!" June froze to rigidity on the threshold. Pope took a firm grip on her arm as he too stood transfixed with horror.

HONUAPO moved past them to the figure of a young woman who, dressed in slip, stockings and slippers, lay collapsed against her vanity mirror. A thick cord of yellow silk, apparently the cord of a bathrobe, was noosed about her throat. The body was still warm when Honuapo touched it. But life was gone.

"You do not touch anything, please," the Hawaiian cautioned. "Just remember what you see."

"I can't!" cried June Darrow. She shut her eyes against the sight of death.

Pope, standing by her, saw that a pink evening gown was laid out on the bed. A rumpled day dress lay beside it. Open on the dresser was a cosmetic jar, and a lipstick was clenched in Laura Gilman's outstretched hand.

Honuapo, remarkably calm, stepped to the room telephone and called Captain Jansenn.

Pope said to June: "You'd better get away. Honuapo and Jansenn will take charge, and I'll take you up on deck."

June opened her eyes to look at him wretchedly. "She couldn't possibly have had anything to do with it. She hardly knew anyone on the ship. She—"

"She just happened to know the number of a murderer's cabin," Pope finished for her. "Come away, won't you?"

"Yes, it is better the lady go away,"

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Honuapo agreed. "And I think it better not to say too much about this, please."

"Right," Pope said. "It might start a panic."

He urged the girl away and they went up to A deck. There, at a small table in the smoking room, Pope ordered wine for June and cognac for himself. Many eyes were on them as they sat there, not only because a mystery was in the air but because Pope was Otis Pope.

Mrs. Royer whispered to Boris Getman: "They told me he's a perennial bachelor. And here he is giving that girl a rush!" Mrs. Royer's tone suggested that it was quite unfair, and almost indecent, for June Darrow to so monopolize Mr. Pope.

June drank her wine. Her poise had returned by now. Distress was in her eyes, but banished from her face. She even managed to smile and nod toward Madam Garaud who, with her plump little German manager, was seated at the next table.

"That's right. Chin up," Pope approved.

"Watch your own, Mr. Pope. Everyone's watching you—and men are so transparent."

"Are they? I hope you're right. Then we can see through whatever mask this killer wears."

"Do you know what I'd like to do with him?" she asked.

"What?"

"I'd like to get him down and stamp on his face, and then pour hot oil into his eyes." June said it with a forced exaggeration of sweetness, but he could see that she was fighting back tears.

"We need some fresh air," Pope said. He took her out on deck.

June said: "It's too brutal! Laura was the most absolutely inoffensive person you can imagine."

"Do you know her background?"

She hesitated for a moment, then answered: "An Iowa school teacher, I think. She said this was the first time she's been away from home."

"Do you know why she booked for Australia?" Pope persisted.

Again Pope noticed a hesitation. "I don't know," she said.

"You don't know anything about her except what you've told me?"

"Nothing," she said.

A MAN was passing along the deck. Pope got the idea that June spoke to him more to change the subject than anything else. Then Pope recognized the man and said, "Hello, Kim Lennox."

Kimbert Lennox stopped. He stared a moment at Pope's extended hand, then took it. "Hello, Otis, old chap. Just heard you're aboard and lost some mail." June thought his heartiness was a little unnatural.

Pope, to steer the talk away from criminal angles for June's benefit, asked, "Are you still living in Montreal, Kim?"

Lennox for some reason appeared reluctant to answer. His eyes avoided Pope's. Then he nodded. "Yes, still in Montreal."

"Your wife's well, I hope?"

This time the inquiry definitely startled Lennox. There seemed to be no reason for it, and yet both Pope and June were aware that the man was uneasy.

"Yes, yes, quite the same," Lennox said.

"She's aboard with you?" Pope asked.

"No, left her at home," Lennox said quickly. "This is just a business trip. Got to run along now. They want me in a poker game."

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Lennox left them abruptly. He went directly to the bar, where he drank three straight whiskies one after another.

"You've been holding out on us, Mr. Lennox." A woman a little way down the bar giggled and Lennox looked that way.

"Holding out on you, Miss Mundy?" he asked vacantly.

Miss Mundy, a tall thin brunette with a flat face and large dissipated eyes, moved closer to him. "Yes, Mr. Lennox. Don't you remember? Only yesterday you said you never drink anything but light wines and beers."

"As a rule I don't," Lennox said with a snap.

Abruptly he left the bar and entered the smoking room, where he was immediately recruited for a game of stud poker.

Otis Pope and June Darrow were still outside at the rail. They stood looking out at the starlight sea, while from inside the pavilion they could hear the music of a dance orchestra. From below them came the swish of running waters as the *Monterey* went gliding serenely on her way.

"You're not going back to that room," Pope said.

"I couldn't," she admitted.

"Of course not. The purser will get you another one."

"And now don't talk about it any more. Don't even think about it."

"But I can't help it," June protested. "Poor Laura! It makes one's own troubles fade into nothing, doesn't it?"

Pope gave her a quick look. It didn't seem to him that a girl as young and beautiful as June Darrow should know anything about trouble. Yet some uncertainty in her tone made him inquire: "Nothing disturbs you personally? I mean is there anything that's entirely outside all this?"

"There was," she said. "But there isn't now."

The figure of First Officer Corliss appeared suddenly beside them. "Devil of a mess below," he said. "The old man's about to go nuts, and he's getting nowhere fast. Sergeant Honuapo's asking questions of everyone near your cabin, Miss Darrow, and in a few minutes this thing'll be all over the ship."

"I wonder," June began, "if the purser could—"

"It's already taken care of, Miss," Corliss said. "They're moving your things over to 345, on the starboard. It's an outside cabin, and you'll find it comfortable. Captain Jansenn asked me to express his sincere sympathy and all that. . . ." Corliss handed her a key to cabin 345.

"No new angles?" Pope asked.

"None," the first officer said, and passed on.

A MOMENT later Dr. Mingo appeared with a radiogram in hand. "It is first answer to messages I sent, Mr. Pope," he announced.

Pope moved closer to the pavilion door for light to read the message. It proved to be from the Hagenheim office at New York, and stated that the only mail sent to Honolulu was an acknowledgment of receipt of Pope's Indo-China S. & L. Co. report.

"Other messages have not arrived," Mingo said.

June was regarding him closely. He was inscrutable and mysterious, she thought, this long-robed Chinese with his Oxford accent. His brow was high and intellectual, but his face might well be a hiding place for secrets.

Something about him . . .

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"I have a feeling," she said when Mingo withdrew, "that nothing could excite that man."

She laughed nervously, and half instinctively her hand went up to her throat.

"Nothing ever excites Dr. Mingo," Pope agreed, "unless it has to do with the welfare of his own country. He's a Chinese patriot, a zealot who sends nearly all the salary I pay him back to charities in his native land."

"He's worked for you a long while?" she asked.

"For many years. He's an accomplished linguist, for one thing, which makes him invaluable to a man whose profession keeps him constantly shifting from one continent to another."

"It's quite late," June said. "Perhaps I'd better—" She stopped suddenly, not so much because she heard a pop somewhere near as because of a strange expression which formed on Pope's face. The hand of Otis Pope slapped there, as though at a sting.

"What is it?" June inquired anxiously. At the same moment she heard running steps overhead on the sun deck.

Pope produced a handkerchief and dabbed at his left temple. It came away with a red stain. "I think," he said, "that someone just took a shot at me from up there." He pointed to the steep steps of a companionway leading to the sun deck.

"At you? How frightful!"

Pope did not respond because by now he was bounding up the companionway. He arrived there to find the sun deck apparently deserted. Nothing was visible in the gloom except funnels, vents, tennis court, pent houses, with a row of lifeboats on either side. And leading down from this deck, he knew, were many avenues of retreat.

CHAPTER V

THE OCTOPUS

"IT'S only a scratch," Pope reported when he returned to June. "Might have been a hornet, if we weren't at sea. But I think it was a gun."

"Let me look," June insisted. She led him to the lighted doorway of the pavilion. Otis Pope inclined his head while the girl, standing on tiptoe and using Pope's handkerchief, carefully wiped away a slim line of blood at the temple.

Boris Getman and Mrs. Royer, who were dancing in the pavilion, saw them there. "Look! Isn't that Mr. Pope?" came shrilly from Mrs. Royer. "He's hurt, isn't he?"

Large and blonde, Mrs. Boyer came swooping up, dragging Getman by the arm. Her voluble inquiries drew attention from a dozen other dancers. The orchestra stopped. A curious and fearful crowd formed around June Darrow and Otis Pope.

"Will you call the ship's doctor, Mr. Getman?" June said.

"No," Pope protested, "just tell the ship's doctor I'll be right down to his office. I'm not hurt. A nick on the skin, that's all." In a lower voice he said to June: "Telephone 340 and ask Honuapo to come up, won't you?"

June nodded and went looking for a telephone. The nearest one was at the bar. From there she called 340 and Honuapo answered.

"Mr. Pope has been shot," she said. "Thank goodness he isn't hurt badly. Will you come quickly?"

A buzz of comment arose from the bar's customers. It was then five minutes before eleven o'clock, and by the time six bells struck news was all over the ship that an attempt had been made on Otis Pope's life.

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"All this needs," the doctor said, "is an inch or so of court plaster." Deftly he applied it to a shallow groove in the skin just over Pope's left ear.

They were in the doctor's office on D deck. Captain Jansenn stood by looking chagrined and helpless. Sergeant Honuapo likewise seemed to be discouraged. First Officer Corliss, on the other hand, was bustling.

"We got something to look for now, Mr. Pope," he said. "A gun. A bullet made that nick. And the gun must have a silencer."

"Either that or it's a gun of small caliber," Pope said. "The orchestra was booming on one side of us, and waves were striking the ship on the other."

"The second officer has a detail searching the sun deck," Jansenn said.

"We have something else," Corliss went on. "A definite time. You were shot at at ten-fifty. On the dot. So anyone with a ten-fifty alibi is out of it."

"You're assuming," Pope asked doubtfully, "that the person who shot at me is the same one who killed the steward and Miss Gilman?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"The mail theft and the two murders link," Pope said. "But I can't see any tie with an attempt on my life."

"There's bound to be," Jansenn broke in fretfully. "Are you trying to say that the whole ship's alive with thieves and murderers?"

"I want you to go to bed now," the doctor directed.

"Yes," advised Jansenn, "and you'd better stay there until we get our hands on that fellow."

But Pope wouldn't hear of it.

BREAKFAST was served at eight. On that first morning out of Honolulu, passengers at nearly every table were bombarding waiters with inquiries. Was it true that a lady passenger had been murdered? And a room steward? Did the waiter know who fired at Mr. Pope?

Waiters were in their element. All waiters like to be looked upon as oracles by their patrons. Never before had their wisdom been so much in demand as now. Some of them saw extra tips in the offing, in pursuit of which they assumed airs of profound knowledge.

"Yes, madam. But Sergeant Honuapo—he's in charge you know—he'd rather I wouldn't give out anything, just yet."

An elderly hunchback was breakfasting alone at a small corner table. He had a shrunken mouth, indicating a paucity of teeth. He was cantankerous and hard to please, never able to take anything except juices and soft foods. "What's all this mystery about, anyway?" he complained this morning.

"Haven't you heard. Mr. Benedict?" his waiter whispered. "Mr. Pope's mail stolen. A room steward killed and the body taken ashore from quarantine. A lady murdered too. Then, to top it all, somebody tried to shoot Mr. Pope."

"I want pineapple juice and soft-boiled eggs," snapped the toothless old hunchback. He glared severely up at the waiter through large, black-lensed glasses. "And who's Mr. Pope?"

At that same moment Otis Pope presented himself at the head steward's counter in the forward E-deck lobby. The head steward was seated there at a dining room chart, for the purpose of assigning Honolulu passengers to tables.

Not having come down for dinner last night, Pope as yet had not been assigned.

The head steward arose obsequiously. "Good morning, Mr. Pope. I've been expecting you. Missed you at din-

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ner last night. You'll be at the captain's table, of course."

Pope gave a grimace of mock alarm. "You wouldn't wish anything like that on me, would you, Dave?" he protested. "Captain's tables are terribly dull."

The head steward looked dazed. Never before had a passenger declined the honor of being seated at the captain's table.

"May I have a look at that chart?"

"Of course." The steward spread out the table chart. On it the names of occupants were written by each chair.

After a close scrutiny, Otis Pope indicated a table for two by a wall. "Put me there, Dave," he said.

"But Mr. Pope, don't you see? That table is assigned to two ladies. I'm sorry—"

"It *was*," Pope corrected.

The head steward—as he remembered with a shock—quickly recovered from his embarrassment.

"Why certainly, Mr. Pope. Right this way."

Voices hushed and ten-score pairs of eyes followed the stalwart and elegantly tailored figure of Otis Pope as he arrived at June Darrow's table.

He took the seat opposite her. "Thought it might help if you didn't have to sit staring at an empty chair."

The look of surprise in June's eyes changed to gratitude. "That *was* thoughtful," she said. "Laura and I—"

"I looked at the chart," Pope said quickly.

June bit her lip. "I got terribly attached to her, these last five days. Her deck chair is—was—next to mine, too."

"I'll have my card put on it, if you don't mind," Pope suggested. "We've a good deal to talk over, you know."

"Talk over?"

"Not here. Later."

"I really don't want a thing," June said. "I came along just to keep this thing from getting me down."

Pope gave his own order.

June asked for black coffee and porridge. When the waiter looked askance Pope explained, "The lady is an Australian and she means oatmeal."

They both laughed then, and Pope went on to talk of anything except current tragedies—of restaurants he liked in Capetown, Cairo, Paris.

Others were looking at them. The neat taping of court plaster on Pope's temple was observed and discussed by many breakfasters that morning. Old Mr. Benedict's waiter pointed covertly. "That's Mr. Pope over there—the big handsome gentleman eating with the girl in blue. See that mark over his ear? An inch closer and we'd have had murder number three."

AT his own table, Pope managed to slip his waiter a five-dollar bill and a whispered instruction, together with his card. Later, when he arrived on A deck with June, that card was posted on a deck chair occupied until yesterday by Laura Gilman.

"You think of everything," June said as she settled in her own chair. "Now what is it we should talk about?"

Pope sat down and said: "About that shot last night. How do we know it was fired at me?"

"Of course it was," June said.

"Probably. But possibly not at me but at you. You were only a foot away from me, and it was fairly dark."

June scoffed at the idea. "At me? It couldn't have been. Don't be silly!"

"I'm quite serious," Pope said.

"But no one would—"

"Are you sure?" He looked at her closely.

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"You mean because I was seen to carry information to you in the library? To you and Mr. Honuapo? But the information wasn't important. Besides, once I'd given it, it was too late for the guilty man to do anything about it."

"I don't mean that," Pope said. "I'm remembering what you said last night about troubles. You said it makes one's own troubles seem like nothing. Somehow I got the idea you might have a private worry of some kind. Mind telling me about it?"

June looked out to sea. "There's a big black fish jumping," she said.

Pope said urgently: "If there's anything, why not tell me?"

"There was something. But there isn't now."

It was the same answer she had given him last night. Pope waited patiently. In a moment she asked, "Do you know Ellery Crotchet?"

"You mean Crotchet of the Crotchet South Seas Trading Company?"

"M-m," she affirmed.

The name was familiar to Pope. He knew that Crotchet (S S) Trading Company, merchants, traders and shipowners, was a two million pound corporation operating from a base at Sydney. It was a concern dominated by Ellery Crotchet, and maintained trading stations at all important islands of the South Pacific.

"Is Crotchet on this ship?" he asked.

"No. He's on the *Mariposa,* coming north. We're due to pass him at sea in a few days."

"How do you know?"

"I bought the latest Sydney paper at Honolulu yesterday," she said, "and it mentions that Ellery Crotchet is making a business trip to America and will be on the next *Mariposa.*"

"You know him yourself?"

"I wish I didn't." June gave an unconscious shudder and Pope's interest quickened.

"Why do you think of him now?"

"That's it! Why *do* I? I suppose it's because a sly, treacherous thing like stealing your post would naturally make me think of Crotchet. It sounds rather weird, but he actually came into my dreams last night and I woke up thinking—no, it couldn't be Crotchet. He's on the *Mariposa* and this is the *Monterey.*"

POPE concealed his astonishment. If she felt that way about Ellery Crotchet, there must be a reason personal to herself. He thought back to her words last night, spoken just after the murder of Laura Gilman: "There was something; but there isn't now." This psychic thread of connection made him ask again: "Do you know why Miss Gilman was going to Australia?"

And again her negative response was unconvincing.

Pope tried again. "Why did you yourself make a trip to America?"

"Must I let my hair down?"

"It does one good."

"Very well. I made a tour to America to escape the extremely unwelcome attention of Mr. Ellery Crotchet."

"Is he that bad?"

"Did you ever hear what they call him?" she asked.

Pope thought a moment. "I believe," he said, "that I've heard his corporation referred to as 'The octopus of the South Seas.' I suppose that's because it's ridden roughshod over so many small independent traders."

"The name fits Crotchet himself," June said. "He's so intensively vulpine and predatory. Pries into the secrets of his competitors—stops at nothing

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to get what he wants—always reaching out with many tentacles for anything worth picking up in the South Seas."

Pope smiled. "I take it you don't like him."

"I loathe him. When he touches you, you feel as if an octopus were really reaching out for you."

June took a cigarette from her purse. Otis Pope held a match for her.

"So this human octopus is on the *Mariposa,*" he prompted, "a sister ship bound north and due to pass us at sea in a few days."

"It's a relief to know that," she said.

"That you won't find him waiting on the wharf at Sydney?"

"Yes."

"Is that all? I mean is that why you did have a worry, and don't, now?"

"That is all."

Otis Pope had a suspicion that it wasn't. There was something else. June Darrow was an independent, modern girl. He knew by now that she was alone in the world, and had supported herself at Sydney in a stenographic position for the last three years. Such a girl, he thought, wouldn't make a tour to America simply to avoid the attentions of an unwelcome suitor.

That Crotchet had made love to her he did not doubt. Neither could he doubt she felt more or less relieved that he should now be sailing north on one ship while she herself sailed southward on another. But it must go deeper than that. She was holding something back—Otis Pope felt certain of it.

The personable Raymond Ladislaw stopped before them. He greeted June eagerly, and Pope with less enthusiam. "Deck tennis, June?" he asked.

"I couldn't," she said.

Ladislaw threw a sharp look at Pope. "Of course," he said. "After what happened last night I suppose no one feels very playful." He passed on.

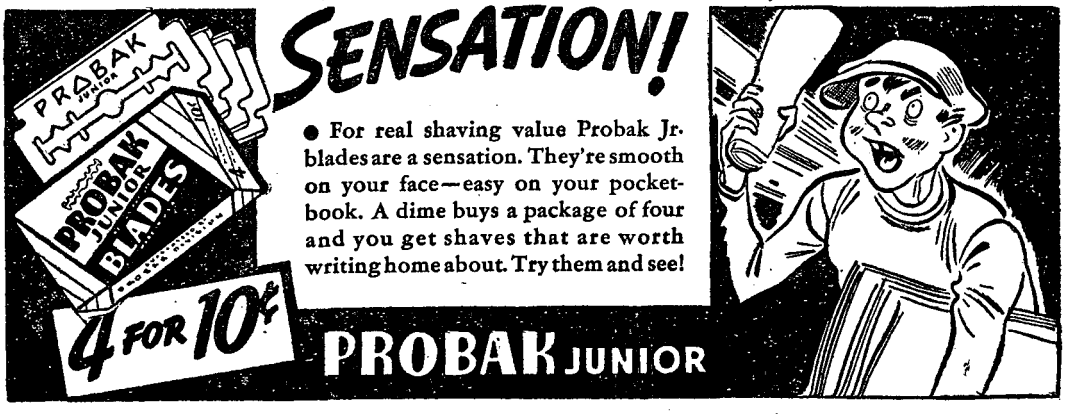
Pope said lightly: "But if the tentacles of this man Crotchet are really so long and so deadly, he might reach out from ship to ship as he passes us at sea!"

"Don't be pessimistic," June said.

His banter made her look at him with resentful challenge. "I suppose you think I've been crying on your shoulder!"

"You haven't," Pope admitted with a grin. "But don't hesitate a minute—any time you feel like it."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK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LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS

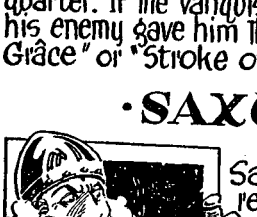
·COUP DE GRÂCE·

Today, this term means a killing stroke, or final blow. It had its origin in medieval days. When a knight was felled, even though the wound was slight, he could not rise because of his weighty armor. His victor would poise a thin-bladed dagger (dagger of mercy) over his visor-slits, and offer him quarter. If the vanquished refused his enemy gave him the "Coup de Grâce" or "Stroke of Mercy."

·MUFTI·

When a soldier dons non-military clothes, he is said to be "In Mufti", from the West Indian word "MUFTEE" meaning civilian.

·SAXONS·



Saxon soldiers received their name from the huge saxas (knives) they carried.

·BOXERS·

In 1900 Chinese soldiers were nicknamed "Boxers" because they had styled themselves "The Society of Harmonious Fists for the Expulsion of Foreigners."

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Main Line West

By PHILIP KETCHUM

Complete Novelet

I

WHEN the stage from Fort Leavenworth reached Denver City and stopped in front of the Denver House, Jim Reed saw Sandy Turpin standing on the porch of the hotel, scowling, and he said to the driver who sat beside him, "It must be pretty definite if it can get old Sandy down."

The driver nodded and spat over the wheel away from the crowd that was gathering around the coach. "It's definite," he muttered. "In Sixty-four —just a couple of years—Denver City won't be any more than a memory. It's doomed."

Reed's lips tightened. "You wouldn't like to make a bet on that, would you?"

The driver pointed to the snow-covered peaks towering just ahead. "There's the answer, Jim. This town's backed up against a wall."

Jim Reed swung to the ground. The stage-coach door was open and the passengers were climbing out. He nodded to those he knew and then frowned as his eyes fell on the girl who was traveling alone. Her name, he

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had learned from the driver, was Nan Scott and he guessed her age at about twenty, but it was a proud twenty for she was tall and slender and she held her head very high and looked about her with clear, calm eyes. On several occasions during the ten-day trip from Fort Leavenworth he had exchanged greetings with her, and each time he had been vaguely troubled, not at anything that she had said but perhaps because he had heard that she was traveling alone, that she had no people out here, and because he knew that Denver City was hardly the place for a girl like her. Only three years before, Horace Greeley had said of it, "There are more brawls, more fights, more pistol shots with criminal intent in this log city of one hundred and fifty dwellings, not three-fourths of them completed, nor two-thirds inhabited, nor one-third fit to be, than in any community of equal numbers on earth." And there had been little improvement since Greeley had made that statement.

The railroad meant life or death to the towns of the early West

Reed started over toward the girl, thinking to offer her assistance, but before he could reach her Sandy Turpin pushed through the crowd of men gathering around the coach and grasped him by the arm.

"Good to see yuh, Jim," Turpin said heavily. "How do things look back east?"

Jim Reed shrugged. "Same as they always did."

"Good, huh?"

"Crowded."

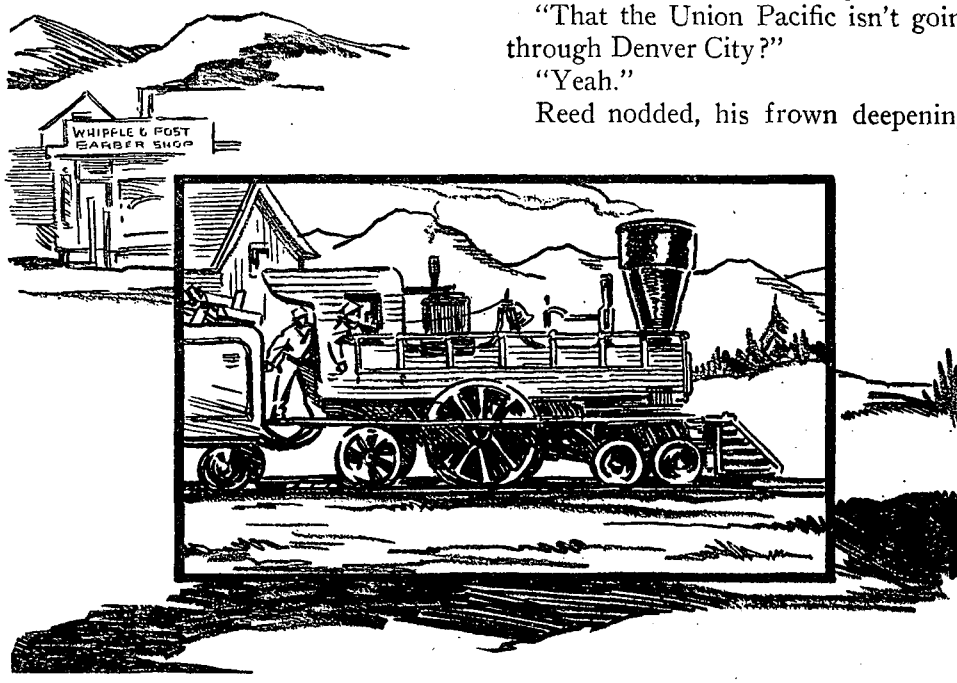
Turpin grinned. He was an older man than Reed. His shoulders were stooped and he was heavily bearded. Beneath an old coat he wore a shirt which had once been white and there was a gun belted around his waist.

"Come on inside," he suggested. "You've heard the news, I guess."

"That the Union Pacific isn't going through Denver City?"

"Yeah."

Reed nodded, his frown deepening.



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He saw Nan Scott turn and start toward the doors of the Denver House and noticed that there was hardly a man who wasn't eying her curiously.

"All right," he agreed. "Let's go inside. Fred will toss my bag out and I can pick it up later."

THEY climbed the porch and passed through the doors into the wide lobby and Reed walked with Turpin up to the desk. Nan Scott was just ahead of them and as they came up Reed saw her shake her head and then heard her ask. "Where will I find Mr. Kimball? Mr. Harry Kimball?"

The clerk gave the girl directions and Jim Reed moved aside as she turned away from the desk. She saw him and smiled but didn't stop.

Reed turned and gazed after her. He heard Turpin say, "So that's one of Kimball's girls. Not bad, huh?" But he made no answer and even after she had gone out the door he stood looking that way.

Turpin finally laid a hand on his arm and asked, "What's wrong, Jim?"

Reed turned around, then, still frowning, and muttered aloud, "I wonder if she knows what she's running into?"

Turpin laughed. "Better be careful, Jim. Elaine wouldn't like it."

At the mention of Elaine's name, Jim Reed brightened. "How is she, Sandy?" he asked.

"Fine as ever. Guess she's out home. She knew you were comin' in but she said she didn't like meetin' people in public."

Turpin asked the clerk to get Jim Reed's bag and then the two men walked over to the hallway which led back to the rooms.

In the room Sandy Turpin had taken, Jim Reed gave his partner a verbal report on his trip. "Everything's arranged," he stated. "The machinery ought to be here in a month. We'll haul it up Clear Creek canyon and go to work on that vein. It's rich enough so we can afford to freight out the gold ore even if we don't get a railroad for a while."

But Turpin wasn't so optimistic. "For a while, maybe," he admitted. "But there's a lot of that ore that ain't so high grade. What about it?"

"We'll save it until the railroad comes in."

"Until when?"

Reed scowled. He said, "Look here, Turpin. You don't take serious stock in that story that the Union Pacific is going to pass up Denver City?"

"I'm afraid I do, Jim."

"But with a direct line west over Berthoud Pass—"

The older man shook his head. "That's just it, Jim. There ain't no straight line west. A man can get over Berthoud Pass when there ain't too much snow and maybe a wagon road could be built over it. But it's too steep for a railroad. The railroad's gotta go north."

JIM REED grunted. He moved over and looked out of the window and for a moment was silent. Then he said, "Just before I left here to go east we had word that Congress had passed a bill authorizing the building of a railroad to the Pacific and on the same day John Evans started raising money to have a survey made of Berthoud Pass, his notion being that once a road was built over that pass, the mail route and eventually the railroad would follow, for it would be shorter than if the route went north. What happened to that survey?"

"It was made—and by a good man."

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"And it proved?"

"That the only way for the railroad to go west would be *through* the mountains. It can't get over 'em."

"The road isn't built yet."

"I know it, Jim, but the mail is goin' north over the old immigrant trail an' the railroad will follow the mail."

Jim Reed made no answer for quite a while. He had known Sandy Turpin for a long time and he respected his judgment. If it was true that a direct route west from Denver City was impossible it was ridiculous to suppose that the Union Pacific would build to Denver and then turn north to the Pass.

"What does that mean, Sandy?" he asked finally.

"It means, Jim, that Denver City won't be the distribution point for this part of the country, that the several thousand men workin' the mines up in the mountains might as well move on. The streams have been pretty well panned. The day is past when a man can pick up gold on the surface of the ground. They've got to go after it like we planned, with mining equipment. They've got to build smelters, start convertin' low-grade ore. But until we get a railroad we're sunk, an' it don't look like we'll get one."

"Why not? Why not a branch line?"

"You'd have to fight for it. Already men are movin' away."

"There's still gold in those hills."

"Yeah, but the big town to serve this region will be where the rails stop."

The two men talked for a while longer, then, lighting his pipe, Jim Reed said, "I suppose I'd better look up Elaine. See you later, Sandy."

He went outside and stood for a while on the porch of the Denver House, looking out over the town and staring, occasionally, at the background of mountains. He had been among the first men to settle here and during the past five years he had come to feel that some day, here, there must be a great city. There was a great untold wealth in the hills and to the east, north and south stretched broad, fertile plains. The dust storms and the severe winters of the prairie states were unknown. If only those mountains didn't loom as such an insurmountable barrier, here there might grow another Chicago.

He studied the faces of the men who passed by, listened to snatches of conversations. Several acquaintances spoke to him briefly. He saw Mr. Byers, militant publisher of the *Rocky Mountain News,* arguing a point with John Evans. He started toward them then veered off as he noticed young David Moffatt across the street. Crossing over to him he said, "Hello, Dave. What's this I hear about the railroad?"

Moffatt frowned. "True, I'm afraid."

"What are you going to do with your store? Move north to Cheyenne?"

"Not at all," Moffatt answered crisply. "If the railroad can't go over those mountains, some day it'll go through them. I'm staying here and fighting for it."

Moffatt's answer brought a grin to Jim Reed's lips. "If there's enough like you we'll get our road. Many people movin' out?"

"Too many."

"Can't it be stopped? Can't we get them to stay here and fight?"

"If we could, Jim, the fight would be half won. The Union Pacific couldn't ignore us. But with the mail going through to the north and the Pony Express turning north at Julesburg, we're pretty much out in the cold right now."

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Reed nodded and moved on and suddenly he discovered that he was standing in front of the Golden Nugget saloon and, pushing open the door, he entered.

II

THE Golden Nugget seemed to be doing a flourishing business. Its long bar was crowded with miners who had come down from the hills and the gambling tables at one side of the room were filled. It was a loud, noisy crowd. Here and there women mingled with the miners, encouraging them to buy drinks, their voices and language almost as coarse as those of the men they sought to please.

Reed's eyes swept over the room seeking Harry Kimball, owner of the Golden Nugget, while his mind reverted to Nan Scott who had come in on the stage from Ft. Leavenworth. Though he had heard her ask for Kimball and thought he knew that she hadn't come to Denver City because she had any people here, he still couldn't believe that she was like these other women.

Across the room a door opened and two men stepped into the barroom. Reed's eyes narrowed as he saw them. One of the men, Harry Kimball, was tall, broad-shouldered, dark of face. He was wearing a black belted coat, a silk shirt with a flowing tie and plaid trousers. Like many of the others, he wore a gun and rumor had it that he packed a knife in a sheath at his neck. The other man, older, thin-faced, slightly stooped, was Elaine's father, Joseph Porter.

What business Porter could possibly have with the saloon-keeper Jim Reed couldn't imagine. Porter was a land speculator who had made a fortune in Denver City lots. He was a man who drank too much sometimes but had never become involved with the rougher element of the city such as represented by Kimball.

While Reed watched them the two men shook hands, then Porter moved over to the bar and Reed headed that way.

As he neared it, however, he stopped. At a table over in one corner of the room he saw Nan Scott sitting between two bearded miners. She was wearing a pink dress with lace at the throat and her face seemed very pale. She was staring straight ahead.

For a moment Jim Reed looked at her, frowning. He saw one of the miners lean over toward her, slip an arm around her shoulder. He saw her wince, draw away, and then he saw the miner, obviously drunk, try to clasp her in his arms.

The girl stiffened. She drew back her hand and slapped the miner in the face with such force that it tipped his chair over backward, spilling him to the floor. Then the girl stood up, her fists clenched, a deep flush of color in her face.

Several men who had seen the incident, laughed, and as Nan Scott turned away Harry Kimball stepped up to her and grasped her wrists. What Kimball said Jim Reed couldn't hear, but he saw the girl try to pull away and then he saw Kimball shove her back against the wall.

Reed moved forward then until he stood directly behind the saloon-keeper and laying one hand on the man's shoulder, he said, sharply, "Kimball, I wouldn't do that."

Harry Kimball released the girl and swung around. His face darkened at the sight of Jim Reed. "Who asked you to interfere?" he questioned dryly.

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Reed shrugged. "No one."

"Well, the girl's workin' for me," Kimball snapped. "An' I tell her what to do. Get it?"

"I'm not working for you, Mr. Kimball," said the girl, clearly.

Jim Reed smiled. "Then I guess that settles it."

A DOZEN or more men had been attracted by the altercation and now surrounded them, watching them curiously. From halfway across the room a voice drawled, "A dollar on Jim Reed, guns, knives or fists," and at the sound of that voice, Kimball flushed and snarled, "It doesn't settle it. How do you like this, Mr. Jim Reed?" His hand shot out and his fingers made a livid mark on Jim Reed's cheek.

For the space of several seconds Jim Reed didn't move. He was aware of the fact that the men behind him were scurrying to the walls of the room, getting out of the path of any possible shots; he was aware of Nan Scott's eyes staring at him, suddenly frightened and very large; and he was aware of a cold, blinding anger which seemed to sweep over him, destroying all other emotion. Harry Kimball stood directly in front of him, thin lips parted in a mocking smile. "Well?" he drawled.

Reed's fist smashed out. The blow caught Kimball in the mouth. It hurled him back against the wall. One of his hands clawed for his gun, got it out, but Reed, stepping up close to him, grabbed Kimball's wrist and twisted it sharply.

The gun slid from Kimball's fingers, fell to the floor and Reed kicked it out of the way and released the man's wrist. A fist thudded against the side of his jaw but he shook his head and straightened, dodged another blow and then hit Kimball twice more.

The saloon-keeper reeled against a table, fell over it, rolled off and when he stood up there was a knife in his hand. Some men shouted a warning as he lunged forward but Reed had seen the knife and he avoided its desperate thrust, again grasping Kimball by the wrist. Whirling, he heaved the saloon-keeper over his shoulder.

Kimball fell heavily to the floor, rolled from side to side, gasping. His face was mottled and bloody. One eye was discolored. Reed stared down at him and then looked around the room. Several of Kimball's close associates were scowling but most of the miners were jubilant. Reed was a miner. They were on his side and Kimball's men didn't dare try anything while they were there.

Reed looked around for the girl and, not seeing her, guessed that she had gone. He looked for Joseph Porter but Porter, too, was gone. Half a dozen men offered to buy him a drink but he shook his head and moving over to the door stepped outside. He was a little ashamed of himself for having become involved in a barroom brawl.

HALF an hour later he knocked on the door of Joseph Porter's cabin, which was about a dozen blocks from the main street of the town. Elaine, herself, answered his knock. She looked just as he had known she would look and, staring into her face, he drew a deep breath, marveling anew at her beauty. She was tall, with a wealth of golden hair and clear blue eyes which matched the blue of the distant mountains. There was a delicate sunset glow in the color of her cheeks. Her smile was a slow thing which started with the corners of her lips and which gradually lighted up her whole face and it came now and at its crest

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she said, "You're quite a laggard, Jim. I was expecting you earlier."

He stepped forward and would have taken her in his arms but she evaded him, whispering, "A visitor inside. Come on in and meet him. Later—"

Joseph Porter's voice boomed out. "Come on in, Jim. Man here I want you to meet."

Over Elaine's shoulder Jim Reed saw Joseph Porter and as Elaine backed away he caught a glimpse of another man. He came out into the room, shook hands with Porter and then was introduced to Jack Chaffee. Chaffee was wearing a dark suit, a clean white shirt. His hand, when Reed shook it, was smooth as a woman's and his fingernails were clean and polished. He was a large man, red of face, with wide jaws and neat sideburns.

"So this is the young man," he said to Porter, "who knocked down the saloon-keeper."

Porter laughed and looking at Reed said, "Who was she, Jim? Elaine, here, is jealous."

Jim Reed shifted uncomfortably. He said, "It didn't amount to anything."

"Sure?" asked Elaine.

He looked at her. There was a mocking smile on her lips and he suddenly felt on the defensive.

Porter said, seriously, "Kimball's a bad man to cross, Jim. He won't forget what you did to him."

Reed shrugged. "The town's full of bad men."

Porter nodded vaguely as though he had suddenly lost interest in the subject. He looked over at Chaffee and then back to Reed and asked, "What do you think of the last report on Berthoud Pass?"

Reed shook his head. "I hope it's wrong."

"But if it isn't?"

"I don't know. We'll probably have a hard time getting the Union Pacific to build to Denver City and we've got to have a railroad."

Porter looked at Chaffee, nodding. Then he asked: "How will you get it?"

Reed shrugged. "The charter's just been issued to build the road. It'll be a couple of years before it could reach this far. Denver City can go a long ways in that time. It can get so big that it can't be overlooked."

Porter turned to Chaffee. "Can I tell him?" he asked.

Chaffee nodded. "It's up to you."

Porter rubbed his hands together. He said, "Jim, there is a pass through the Rockies, an easy pass. Chaffee, here, knows the route. He learned it from a Ute Indian."

Reed straightened. "Where is it?"

"About fifty miles north," Chaffee answered.

Jim Reed was aware of a quickening of his blood. "That's not too far," he breathed. "The Union Pacific will build through Denver City if it doesn't have to go north any more than that to get across the divide. Has the pass been surveyed?"

Chaffe shook his head and Porter said: "We haven't mentioned anything about the pass as yet. I'm having a private survey made. Within a week I should have the maps in my possession. But I don't want to talk about it, Jim, until I'm sure. You can understand that, can't you? There's been too many unfounded rumors for the good of Denver City."

There was no question of that.

Jim Reed turned to Chaffee. "How high is the pass?"

"It's under nine thousand feet."

Reed whistled. He knew something of the mountains to the north and a

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way through them as low as nine thousand feet seemed too good to be true.

"I'll be mighty glad to see that survey," he remarked.

Elaine excused herself and went out into the kitchen. Joseph Porter invited Reed to stay for supper and while they waited the three men talked over the development of mining claims in the mountains and the coming of the railroad. Chaffee had very little to say. He talked some of the pass but his description of it was very indefinite.

Reed left quite soon after supper. He didn't have a chance for much conversation with Elaine for Chaffee was staying there and Elaine said she was tired and planned to retire early.

"I'll be out to see you tomorrow," he promised.

"If the little girl from the saloon lets you?" she asked mockingly.

Jim Reed laughed. "I'll probably never see her again. Good night, Elaine."

She told him good night, but she didn't stand in the doorway of her cabin to watch him leave as she usually did.

III

THE night was dark and as Jim Reed turned back toward Blake street, only a few lighted windows here and there served to show him any more of the town than the shadowy outlines of log or mud-brick houses. He crossed over to the bank of Cherry creek and listened for a while to its gurgling voice. It was low, now, but a few months before it had been an angry torrent, threatening to overflow its banks and flood the town.

While he stood there his mind turned to the future. The control of Cherry creek was a problem they would have to face, either by widening its channel or digging a diversion ditch outside the city proper. Already more substantial dwellings were replacing the earlier tents and dugouts in which so many people had lived in the first years of the town. The building of a railroad and the control of this creek loomed now as the two main problems. Of course there were still the Indian and men of the caliber of Harry Kimball to dispose of, but advancing civilization would take care of them.

Turning back from the creek Jim Reed came to Blake street and moved on toward the Denver House. Every third or fourth building here was a saloon or gambling hall and the sound of revelry was loud in the street. Already the miners had started coming in from the hills, some of them driven down by the snows, some with a stake and a thirst for excitement to quench before returning to the gold fields. Here and there groups of men loitered on the street, laughing, talking, some of them singing.

He had just passed one such group and was nearing the Denver House when a woman's voice called his name. He stopped, turned toward the shadows between two of the buildings. And then he saw her step forward and though he couldn't see her face clearly he knew at once that the girl was Nan Scott. She was wearing a long dark coat which reached almost to the ground. Her head was uncovered and the wind had mussed her hair.

"I must see you for a minute," the girl said, stepping up to him.

He nodded. "Shall we go on to the hotel?"

Nan Scott's head went back and for an instant a wide, startled expression showed in her eyes. "I—I believe you really mean that," she breathed.

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He frowned. "Of course."

A low laugh came from the girl's throat but she shook her head. "No, you've already done too much for me."

Jim Reed shrugged away her reference to the fight in the Golden Nugget. He was about to speak when the girl said:

"I want to thank you for that, of course, but I'm sorry that you did it. Mr. Kimball was furious after you had gone. I'm afraid he means to—to kill you."

"You didn't leave right away?"

"No."

"You didn't leave at all?"

"Oh, I left, all right," the girl answered. Then she added bitterly, "No matter what people here may think of me, I didn't know what I was getting into when I came out here. I've left but I didn't leave right away. I went to the room he had given me to get my clothing. The—the partitions are thin. I heard Mr. Kimball and two other men talking together. They were talking about you."

Jim Reed's lips tightened.

"They mentioned another man, too," the girl continued. "A Mr. Ben Holladay."

"Ben Holladay?" Reed gasped.

"Yes."

JIM REED'S eyes searched up and down the street. The only Ben Holladay he knew was the man whose stage lines already spanned half of the great western country. Several years before he had worked for Holladay. He knew him quite well. But where did Holladay fit into this picture?

He said to Nan Scott, "Kimball talks a lot. Don't worry about me." Then, frowning, he asked, "What did you mean a while ago about referring to what people here in Denver City thought of you? Why, you've just arrived."

A thin smile touched the girl's lips. "Yes, I've just arrived, but I made the mistake of going to Mr. Kimball's saloon. When I tried to get a room at the Denver House a few hours ago I was turned down. And a couple of other places wouldn't take me in."

"But—"

"It seems that I've acquired a reputation," she said. "I've been told that I belong below Blake street."

Jim Reed stared at the girl. The smile was gone from her face. Around her lips was a tight, determined expression.

He said slowly, "Do you mean that Kimball is responsible? Did he—"

Nan Scott stepped forward and laid a hand on his arm. She looked directly into his eyes. "I didn't watch for you—stop you—to talk about my problems. I'll get along. I just wanted to tell you what I heard."

Two men passed them looked at them curiously, but Jim Reed wasn't aware of their stares. "Where are you staying?" he asked.

"I've found a place with a woman called 'Mother Slaughter.'"

"There?"

"Oh, it isn't such a bad place."

"Where's your home?"

"I haven't one."

"Well, where did you come from?"

"St. Louis."

"Why don't you go back?"

The girl shook her head. "I've come west. I intend to stay."

"But what will you do?"

"I've a little money and I can cook. I'm going to open a restaurant."

"Have you found a place?"

"No."

"See a man named Meyers. Aaron Meyers. Tell him I sent you and tell

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him to let you use Brinstead's cabin."

"But I—" Her voice broke off. She caught her breath and Jim Reed saw her eyes were looking past him, on up the street.

He whirled, shoving her roughly aside as he did so. From the shadows of a building a dozen paces away an orange flame stabbed out at him and then the sound of a shot broke the stillness of the night. A bullet whistled past his ear.

Instinctively, Jim Reed ducked. Then he stumbled, fell forward on his face, lay motionless, but staring ahead as he saw the indistinct figure of a man turn and start running away while Nan Scott screamed and then got up and hurried forward to his side.

MEN poured out into the street from the nearby saloons, shouting questions at each other. Reed sat up, got to his feet. He said swiftly to Nan Scott, "A clean miss. Come on, let's get out of here."

"You—you're not hurt?"

He shook his head. "But if I had been wearing a gun that man who shot at me would have been."

They slipped between two of the buildings and came out on a dark, quiet street. Reed was holding Nan's arm. The girl was trembling. "I saw that man coming down the street," she said. "He stopped, reached of his gun and stepped into the shadows."

Jim Reed nodded. He hurried the girl to the corner, stopped. "You go straight to Mother Slaughter's," he ordered. "It's just a few steps on down this street. You won't be bothered."

"What are you going to do?"

Reed ignored the girl's question. "See Meyers in the morning," he continued. "He'll help you get started."

The girl shook her head. "No. That would only cause you more trouble."

Reed placed a hand on her shoulders. He said, "Look here, Nan Scott. If you think that what I did for you is responsible for that shot at me tonight, forget it. This thing goes deeper than that. You said that you heard Holladay's name mentioned there in the Golden Nugget. What was said about him?"

"One man said that they ought to get Holladay, too."

"Anything else?"

"No."

Reed nodded. "All right. See Meyers in the morning." And then turning abruptly away he walked toward the Denver House.

SANDY TURPIN was waiting for him in the lobby and when he entered Turpin got out of his chair and hurried over to him.

"I was gettin' a little worried about you, Jim," Turpin said. "Just went up to Porter's a while back an' Elaine said you had left."

"I took a walk before heading this way," Reed explained.

Turpin grunted, then said, "Some men were here a while ago to see you."

"Who?"

Turpin mentioned some names and, recognizing them as belonging to some of Denver City's leading citizens, Jim Reed looked puzzled. "What did they want?"

"Don't know. They'll be back."

Reed shrugged. "Let's go to the room."

They walked back to the room Turpin had taken and, opening his bag, Jim Reed took out his gun belt and holster. He strapped the belt around his waist, adjusted the holster to his liking, and then examined his gun.

"What's the idea?" Turpin asked.

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Reed looked up. "When you've got a dirty job ahead of you, what's the best thing to do?"

"Get it over with."

"Well, that's what I intend to do."

"Who is it, Jim."

"I'm not sure but I think it's Kimball. I—" He broke off as there was a knock on the door.

"Come on it," Turpin called.

The door opened and four men crowded into the room. They were all older men than Reed, and Reed recognized them at once as the men Turpin had mentioned as having called to see him earlier in the evening. He shook hands with them and then leaned against the wall as two of them sat down on one of the bunks and the other two stood facing him.

One of the men, a tall, heavy-set individual whose name was later to be written indelibly into the history of Colorado, said to him, "You used to work for Ben Holladay, didn't you, Jim?"

Jim Reed nodded. "When I first came west. Yes."

"We want you to go to work for him again," said the man abruptly.

Reed frowned, shook his head. "Sandy Turpin and me are in the mining business now. There are younger men for Holladay's work."

"But we want you to do it for Denver City, Jim."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this," answered the man. "Ben Holladay has bought the stage line from Denver City to Ft. Leavenworth. He already controls the other lines west and has, as you know, the government mail contracts. Well, in return for certain concessions from our territorial legislature which we have promised him, he has agreed to route the mail stages through Denver City and then north through Cheyenne and over South Pass. Maybe you can guess what that means to us here. It will keep Denver City on the map, help us to bring in the railroad."

REED looked over at Turpin, remembering what Turpin had said to him earlier that evening. It would mean a great deal to Denver City, he knew, to have the mail stages routed through the town, would do much to offset the discouragement over the reports on Berthoud Pass, would help keep up the spirit of the town.

"But where do I come in?" he asked.

"Holladay wants you back. I might as well tell you this. There was a lot of opposition to changing the route and sending the mail through here. Holladay has received some thinly veiled warnings to the effect that it will never prove successful. He anticipates trouble. There are some people anxious to see Denver City die—land speculators who have bought up the ground around Cheyenne and see a chance to make a lot of money when people leave here and move up there. Holladay seems to think a lot of you. He said, 'Give me Jim Reed as trouble-shooter an' the mail stages will be rolling through Denver City in less than thirty days.' That's the story."

Reed looked again over at Turpin.

"I can handle things for a while," Turpin offered. "It means a lot to us, Jim."

Reeds lips tightened. His mind went back over his experiences with Ben Holladay's organization. Those had been wild, rip-snorting years. Fights with Indians, brushes with outlaws, had been the order of the day, and living had been half a matter of luck and half a matter of his ability to use his guns and fists. He had thought that he had

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put those days behind him. The excitement appealed to him no longer. He wanted to bend his efforts toward building up a community. He wanted to settle down. In another month he and Elaine were to be married, and marriage didn't fit into the kind of a life Ben Holladay offered to him.

"For Denver City, Jim," a voice reminded him.

He looked at the man facing him and nodded. "All right. I'll do it."

"Holladay wants to see you. He's in Omaha. You'll have to leave tonight."

Reed drew a deep breath. "All right. Tonight."

He thought of Elaine. She would understand, he decided. Sandy Turpin could talk to her. Then he found himself thinking of Nan Scott and suddenly he said, "There's one thing I want to ask of you men."

"What is it?" one of them asked.

He told them of Nan Scott, of her plans to start a restaurant. "She didn't know what she was getting into when she went to Kimball's," he finished, "and Kimball has talked about her since she walked out on him. If I have to leave tonight I want you to promise me to see that the girl gets a chance to stand on her own two feet. She won't ask for more."

The men in the room looked at one another, then one of them said, "She'll get it, Jim. I'll see Meyers myself and help her to get started."

IV

IT WAS two weeks before Jim Reed returned to Denver City. Most of those two weeks had been spent in the saddle. He was thinner when he dismounted in front of the livery stable a block from the Denver House and there was a deeper shade of tan on his cheeks. He had been to Omaha and had seen Ben Holladay. He had traveled to Fort Leavenworth and had conferred with the men in charge of the offices of the Overland Mail. He had heard a great many rumors, had learned a few facts. His own assignment was clear. It was up to him to see that the Overland Mail didn't have trouble on the new route through Denver City.

"I've been warned," Holladay had told him, "to stay away from Denver City. I've been advised to follow the Pony Express route north from Julesburg and then through Cheyenne. It was hinted that the Arapahoes might go on the warpath. Jim—find out who's causing the trouble an' stop it. . . ."

Turning his horse over to the man at the livery stable, Jim Reed turned toward the Denver House. Half way there he passed the cabin which had once belonged to Brinstead. Over the door a sign now proclaimed it to be the Rocky Mountain Restaurant, and through the windows Reed could see several tables covered with white cloths. He started to turn in, then shrugged and walked on, wondering at his hesitation.

Sandy Turpin was at the Denver House.

"Just got here yesterday after a trip up the canyon," he said to Reed. "Thought you might be showin' up soon."

Reed nodded, lowered himself into a chair and stretched out. "What's happened?" he inquired.

"Well, first of all," Turpin reported, "there's talk of a new pass a little north of here. Nothing definite, yet, but there's a town all laid out an' some people are movin' up there. The place is called Ute Bluffs."

"Ute Bluffs, huh?"

"Yeah. An' by the way, old Joseph

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Porter seems to have bought himself in on the ground floor. He's got all the choice lots an' he's well on his way to another fortune."

"How come?"

"Well, if this new pass—Ute Pass they call it—turns out to be practical for the railroad, Ute Bluffs will leave Denver City standin' still."

Reed frowned. He recalled his conversation with Porter and the man introduced to him as Jack Chaffee. By this time Porter should have had the survey he was expecting.

"How's Elaine?" he asked.

"All right," Turpin replied.

Reed looked at his partner curiously. There had been a faint hesitation in Turpin's voice and he saw that Turpin was staring over at the wall.

"Well, what is it, Sandy?"

Turpin shrugged, then said bluntly as a man sometimes speaks to another man whom he knows quite well, "She's a little upset, Jim, about this job you've taken. Told me you had promised her to settle down."

"I did but I couldn't very well avoid this."

"Sure. I told her but—well—I guess she's heard about this other girl, too."

"What other girl?"

"Nan Scott."

"But—"

Turpin scowled. He said, "There's been some talk, Jim. Kimball was back of it, I guess. I don't suppose I should tell you things like this but it's hinted that your interest in Nan Scott is more than casual."

Jim Reed laughed shortly. "I hardly know her."

"Sure. I told Elaine that."

Reed stood up. He was silent for a few minutes, then he asked, "How is she doing—Nan Scott, I mean?"

"Not so well, Jim. The talk about her hasn't helped any, in spite of what the rest of us could do. But I've got to admit that she's got spunk. She keeps a stiff upper lip and looks the world straight in the face. The men are all for her but the women—well—you know how women are. I think Nan's too uppity for 'em, too good lookin', too."

Reed turned to the door. He said, "Thanks, Sandy," and stepped outside.

IT WAS turning dusk as Jim Reed came to Joseph Porter's cabin. Various things had delayed him. Men who had heard of his new job asked him about Holladay's plans, and from half a dozen sources he heard of Ute Bluffs and of the Ute Pass, fifty miles to the north.

It was Elaine who answered his knock. She seemed surprised to see him and when he kissed her there was a stiffness in her embrace which had never been there before. She drew away from him quickly, backed into the cabin.

Jim Reed followed her. He said hesitantly, "I'm sorry that I had to hurry away a couple of weeks ago, Elaine. I asked Sandy to see you and to explain. It was something I couldn't help."

Elaine's eyes searched his face. "Something you couldn't help?"

"Of course."

Elaine Porter sat down. Without taking her eyes from him she said, "Jim, is that the truth?"

Reed straightened. "I've never lied to you, Elaine."

"You took that job for Denver City?"

"Yes."

The girl frowned. After a moment's silence she said, "I think you really believe that, Jim, but there's a wild streak in you that crops out now and then. I—I wasn't sure . . ."

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Her voice broke off and Jim Reed smiled. He said easily, "In a few more months I'll have the stage line working smoothly and then I'll quit. We'll be married then—or any time you say."

"In a few more months?"

"Not any longer."

"But why that long, Jim? Denver City is doomed. Ute Bluffs will replace it. In the last week a hundred families have bought lots up there. The big city is going to be at the mouth of the pass over the mountains."

Reed nodded. There was logic to what she had said. "Does your father have the surveyors' reports?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No. The snows in the mountains delayed the work. But why do you ask me that?"

Reed got out his pipe. He filled it slowly, then said, "I saw Jim Bridger while I was away, Elaine. Bridger says there isn't any pass through the mountains fifty miles north of Denver City. And Bridger knows the Rockies better than any man alive."

Elaine caught her breath. Her face paled then filled with color. "But Bridger must be wrong. Jack has been over the pass."

"Jack?"

"Jack Chaffee."

"He's still here?"

"Yes. He's with my father."

"What do you know of him, Elaine?"

The girl rubbed her hands together. She said flatly, "He's as fine a man as I know, Jim. He's educated, refined—a gentleman."

"You think a good deal of him?"

"I do."

Reed put his pipe into his pocket. He shrugged and said, "I guess maybe I'm just a little too suspicious."

Elaine got to her feet. She came forward until she stood close to Jim Reed and looking up into his face she said, "Jim, give up this job of yours. It'll only mean trouble—fighting. You may be killed. Give it up for me."

Reed put his hands into the pockets of his coat. "You really want me to quit?"

"Yes."

"But you know, of course, that I can't."

"I was afraid that you would feel that way."

"I do, Elaine. When a man agrees to do a job he can't turn his back on it."

Elaine looked down at the floor. She said after a moment's silence, "There isn't only a wild streak in you, Jim. There's a hardness to your character which sometimes frightens me. Sometimes I feel that I hardly know you."

Jim Reed was suddenly aware of a great restlessness, of a need to get the things which were bothering him settled. He said abruptly, "I've got to see your father, Elaine. I've got to see Chaffee."

The girl nodded. "They'll be here later."

"They're in town?"

"Yes."

He turned toward the door. "I'll go hunt them up."

Elaine said nothing to stop him. He stepped to the door, opened it and passed out.

FROM Joseph Porter's cabin, Jim Reed went at once to the Golden Nugget saloon.

Though early in the evening, there was already a large crowd in the saloon. Men lined the bar, two deep, and the gambling tables at the side of the room were crowded. In the back of the room an addition had recently been built and there was a space for danc-

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ing. A stoop-shouldered man was beating out tunes on an old piano to one side.

From just inside the door, Jim Reed surveyed the place. He didn't see either Porter or Chaffee, but at one end of the bar he saw Harry Kimball talking to a tall, swarthy Indian. The Indian turned and walked away just after Reed entered and, pushing forward to the bar, Reed ordered a drink. He was thankful now that he hadn't found the men he was seeking. Such rumors as Holladay had passed on to him indicated that Kimball was a party to the propaganda against sending the mail stages through Denver City and it relieved him not to find Chaffee and Porter here with a man like Kimball.

As the bartender served him a couple of miners Reed knew spoke to him. One man asked him how soon the regular mail coaches would start passing through Denver City and he answered that he expected the first one in less than two weeks. He was just about to move on then when he saw Harry Kimball turn away from the bar and cross over to where two men were leaning against the wall. Kimball didn't seem to notice the two men; he veered away from them and moved on to one of the gambling tables where he stood with his back to the bar, watching the game. But Jim Reed saw those two men. He saw them look suddenly at him and then he saw them whisper together. They separated and began to edge his way. He didn't know either of them but he knew the type. They were men too lazy to work, men adapt at the handling of fire arms. They were men who lived by their wits—and their guns. There were fifty or more such men in the city.

The two who had separated turned toward each other as they neared the bar and, with a studied clumsiness, bumped into each other just a yard or so to the left of where Reed was standing.

Reed's eyes narrowed, turned from side to side in a quick survey of the room. He saw that Kimball had turned around and was looking at him, and then he saw one of the two men flash a glance his way and he knew then what was about to happen as clearly as though all the people concerned were merely acting out parts in a play. The two men would pretend anger at each other, one word would lead to another. A blow would be struck and then the two actors would go for their guns. There might be just two shots or there might be half a dozen, but only one man would be harmed and *he*—Jim Reed—would be that man. It would look as though a stray bullet from the gun of a drunk had wiped out his life. It was a very old trick. He had seen it done before.

ONE of the two men cursed, backed off from the other man. The other man barked an answer. Play at the gambling tables was suspended and everyone looked toward the two men near the bar. Some cautious souls started backing away.

Jim Reed drew a deep breath. He stepped forward swiftly to the side of one of the men and grasped him by the shoulder. "I saw it all," he said sharply. "It wasn't very well done."

The man jerked erect. He had acted drunk a moment before but now he forgot his part. His eyes fastened on Reed's face, widened. Fear showed in them. Then he suddenly pulled away and screamed, "Get him, Joe. Get him!"

The other man snaked out a gun but before he could raise it Jim Reed kicked it out of his hand. A rock-hard

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fist crashed into the man's jaw, sent him hurling back against a table, and whirling around, Reed slammed his other fist into the face of the man who had just jerked away from him.

The man rocked back, too, but he didn't fall and Reed, moving after him, grabbed him by the belt and by the collar of his shirt. Lifting him off the floor he threw him against his partner who was just starting to get up.

The entire action had taken place in just a few seconds. The men watching it seemed a little stunned, a little confused by what had transpired. But though not fully understanding it, plenty of the miners in that room had heard one of the men call out to the other to shoot, and the quick and efficient manner in which Jim Reed had handled them seemed to please the crowd. They gathered around the two fallen men, disarmed the one who still had a gun and then turned to Jim Reed.

But Jim Reed had no eyes for the crowd. He was looking at Harry Kimball and when he started toward Kimball men got out of his way.

Stopping in front of Kimball he said distinctly, "You overplayed your hand that time, didn't you?"

Kimball moistened his lips. "I don't know what you mean."

Reed laughed grimly. He said, "Kimball, you're about through in this town. Take my advice and get out."

But Kimball shook his head. "No, I'm goin' to stay to see Denver City die. The town's about through, Reed. It would take more than Ben Holladay and the whole Overland Stage Company to save it now."

Reed stared at Kimball. What Kimball had just said didn't tie up with the attempt on his life and the determination to block the mail stages route through Denver City. Reed felt confused. Why, if Kimball felt that Denver City was through, did he still want to bother to block the plan to send the mail this way?

Reed said bluntly, "So you're interested in Ute Bluffs, are you?"

Kimball managed a laugh and turned away. Reed stared after him for a while and then went to the hotel.

V

JIM REED didn't see Porter or Chaffee until the next morning, and after he had talked to them he was still unsatisfied. Chaffee said, blandly enough, that the pass was there, all right, but that the survey hadn't been completed because of early snows in the mountains. Porter couldn't talk about anything but Ute Bluffs. He showed Reed a map of the town.

"We're moving out there next month, Elaine and I," he confided. "The place is growing like mad, Jim. Inside of a year it will take all the people from Denver City—and Cheyenne, too. Its location is ideal. Better get on the wagon with us."

Reed said that maybe he would, but he committed himself no further and Sandy Turpin, who had listened in on the conversation, said, after Porter and Chaffee were gone, "You're afraid it's all a gigantic hoax, aren't you, Jim?"

Reed nodded. "Bridger says there isn't any pass there—and you know Bridger."

Turpin frowned. "But would Porter be mixed up in a thing like that?"

"No, he's always been straight. But what about this man Chaffee?"

"No one seems to know much about him, Jim, but several men here in town went out with him to the pass. A snow storm turned them back but he pointed it out to them."

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"Mountains can fool you," Jim remarked. "What looks like a canyon can twist around and end up against a stone wall."

"I know that, but Denver City has pretty well accepted the report concerning Ute Pass."

Jim Reed nodded, understanding how that could be. A pass over the mountains, even fifty miles to the north, meant a great deal to the men whose interests were tied up in the nearby gold fields.

FOR the next two days, Jim Reed loitered in Denver City. He talked to dozens of men concerning the new pass, watched fifty or more families travel out of the city, headed north toward Ute Bluffs. A letter by Pony Express from Ben Holladay, sent down from Julesburg, gave him details of the proposed change in the routes of the mail stages and named the day for the arrival of the first stage. That date was still ten days off and there was little for him to do. Guards would ride on the stage. Ben Holladay's regular machinery would function. His task was merely to be on hand if there was any special trouble.

The day after he received Ben Holladay's letter he saw Nan Scott for the first time, meeting her on the street near the Denver House. They talked for just a moment. Nan thanked him very gravely for what he had done in helping her to find a location for her restaurant. It was obvious that she didn't know of the request he had made of the group of men who had visited him before he left the city.

Reed shrugged. "Forget it. How are things going?"

"Fine," Nan answered. But there was a strained expression around her lips and there were hollows under her eyes. Reed knew that she was lying. Unattached men, many of them, ate in her restaurant. He had discovered that. And financially the place might be a success. But there wasn't any question but that the girl felt the weight of the community's disapproval.

Reed saw nothing more of the two men with whom he had fought in the Golden Nugget. Once he met Kimball on the street but Kimball only smirked at him and passed on.

Each evening he went out to see Elaine and before a week had passed he began to feel that he and Elaine were recapturing their old attachment. For a while he had felt almost embarrassed in her presence but gradually that embarrassment dropped away and on the last night of that first week, Elaine said, suddenly, "Let's not wait any longer, Jim."

"Not wait any longer?" he repeated.

"No. Let's be married tomorrow."

She came up to him and he took her in his arms. "You really mean that?"

"Yes."

"For a while I can't be much of a husband to you," he warned her. "I may have to be away a good deal."

"I know but—but I can stand even that."

And so it was arranged. And when Jim Reed returned to the Denver House that night he felt as he had never felt before in his life. It seemed to him that he was almost a stranger to himself. His mind was confused. He tried to tell himself that this was happiness, but a great restlessness underlay every other emotion and try as he would he would he couldn't discover the reason for it.

When he entered the lobby the clerk on the desk handed him a note. "This came for you about an hour ago," he said.

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Reed accepted the note, opened it and glanced at the few words that it contained. The message was brief.

I must see you at once. It is terribly important. Can you come to the restaurant as soon as you receive this?

Nan Scott

JIM REED frowned. It was quite late. He almost decided to let the note pass until the next day when it suddenly occurred to him that Nan might have overheard something from some of the men who frequented her restaurant—something which it might be important for him to know. Refolding the note he shoved it into his pocket and stepped outside.

It wasn't far to Nan's restaurant and when he reached it Jim Reed saw that a light showed through the windows. He stepped up to the door and knocked, and then, when there wasn't any immediate answer, he opened the door and stepped inside.

There was no one in the room. Across from where he stood an open doorway led to a room in the rear, but that room was dark.

Just what it was that warned him of impending trouble, Jim Reed never knew, but suddenly he was aware of the presence of danger. His senses sharpened and he could feel a tightening of the muscles of his body. Then, from the darkness beyond that open doorway just ahead there came a faint, clicking sound, and when he heard that noise, Jim Reed threw himself sideways, whipping out his gun. The table upon which the single lamp in the room was placed was close to where he had been standing and now he crashed into it, spilling the lamp to the floor where it was extinguished just as a gun roared and a stabbing pain knifed through his side.

The shock from that bullet turned Reed half around, but he fired in answer. Then there were more shots and after a moment he was aware of the fact that he was sitting down on the floor, leaning against the wall, and that the gun in his hand was hot and heavy and empty and that men were rushing past him and out the door. He tried to reach for his other gun but couldn't make it. One arm seemed paralyzed. He tried to get up. There was a singing noise in his ears and the darkness of the room seemed to be pressing into his brain. He thought, confusedly, "I walked into a trap. I'm supposed to be dead. Maybe that's the way it will end. And Nan will be blamed for this. This will finish her."

He rolled over on his knees with the vague notion that he had to get out of the restaurant. And he was in that position when he was aware of a light. Then he felt hands slipped under his arms lifting him.

"Help me—outside," he gasped.

And then, for a while, he knew nothing more.

WHEN Jim Reed recovered consciousness he discovered that he was lying in a bed in a room he had never before been in. There were white curtains at the windows and on a stand at one side of the room there was an ivory-backed dresser set. On the walls were a couple of pictures. He studied them. One was of a storm at sea and it was so real that he could almost feel the cold wet fury of the lashing waves.

Then the door opened and Sandy Turpin stepped into the room. He crossed over to the bed and said, "Well, Jim, that was a close one. The Doc says that you should have died."

"Where am I?" Reed asked.

"In Nan's restaurant—or at least,

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where the restaurant was. It's been closed since the night you were shot. The Doc wouldn't risk movin' you. Any idea who it was who shot at you?"

"No."

Turpin nodded. He said, "The Doc found the note from Nan in your pocket but she says she didn't write it. From her story four men she never saw before took her prisoner here and held her until you showed up."

"That's true," Reed said.

"Is it?" Turpin asked. "Are you sure?"

"Sometimes a man knows that certain things—are true— Sometimes he doesn't need proof."

Sandy Turpin frowned. "All right, Jim, but most of the town don't feel that way. The handwriting on that note was a lot like Nan's."

"Is she here?"

"Yes."

"I want to see her."

Turpin looked at Jim Reed for a long time. He said finally, "Jim, I've got to tell you. You probably owe your life to the care Nan's given you during the past couple days and I think you're probably right—that she didn't send you the note that brought you here. But there's a lot of people who don't feel that way and you've got a real job ahead of you. Nan's connection with Kimball, whether accidental or not, is something people haven't forgotten. You're just going to injure yourself if you're not careful."

"I'll be careful for him," said a voice from the doorway.

Sandy Turpin whirled around, flushed. He said, "I didn't know that you—"

Nan Scott moved into the room. She said, evenly, "That's all right, Mr. Turpin. I'm selling my restaurant. I'm going back to St. Louis."

Turpin backed to the door. "Elaine wanted me to let her know when you could be moved," he said to Reed. "I'll make the arrangements."

AFTER Sandy had gone, Jim Reed looked up at Nan and smiled. "It seems that we're not good for each other."

Nan shook her head. "We're not."

She was standing a pace or so away from the bed with her hands folded in front of her. There was a grave expression on her face and her eyes didn't avoid Jim's.

"You are—really going back?" Jim Reed asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"As soon as I can sell what I have here. I'll need the money to start over again."

Jim Reed felt terribly tired. He knew that he shouldn't be talking. The singing sound was coming back to his ears and Nan's features were beginning to blur. He said, "We just got started wrong—didn't we? It wasn't us—it was the way things happened."

The girl shrugged. "That's all a part of life."

Jim closed his eyes and then he said, suddenly, "Nan, don't go. Please don't go."

He heard her catch her breath and he went on, thinking that he probably sounded delirious, but unable to stop. "Listen, Nan. Don't let things whip you. Fight it out. Someday there'll be a great city here. Someday we'll find a path over the mountains. Places like Kimball's will disappear. There'll be schools, churches, families. If you stay here you can watch all that happen, you can be a part of it. You—"

His voice weakened, broke off. Then he heard the rustling sound of Nan's

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skirt and a moment later he felt her hand on his head. It was cool, soft. It brought a sudden peace to his mind.

"You mustn't talk any more," she whispered.

"You'll stay?" he demanded.

For a long time she didn't answer. Then he heard her say sadly, "No, Jim. It's too late for that, now."

VI

AN HOUR later Jim Reed was moved out to Porter's cabin and for most of the next ten days he was confined to bed. Elaine was the soul of consideration. She was bright, cheerful, entertaining. Not once during that period did she refer to Nan Scott, though on several occasions Jim Reed discovered her looking at him with a curiously puzzled expression on her face.

Friends dropped in to see him. Sandy Turpin was now out at the mines, superintending the installation of the machinery Jim had purchased on his trip east, but there were many others who called and always, in the evenings, Joseph Porter and Jack Chaffee spent some time in his room.

Chaffee was around a great deal but that seemed quite natural since both he and Porter were very much interested in the development of Ute Bluffs. But though Chaffee was always cordial and possessed a droll type of humor, Reed felt a dislike for the man that he couldn't get over.

The first mail stage arrived and departed and was the occasion for a great celebration. Denver City was at last on the main line west. Surely the rails would follow. But there was a ghost at that celebration, a ghost in the developing town of Ute Bluffs. It was true that there hadn't been a great deal of building up there as yet, but more and more people were buying lots in the new town and, with the final survey of Ute Pass, the place would experience a mushroom growth.

Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, disaster struck at the new route of the mail line. On the tenth day of Jim Reed's convalescence, the coach didn't arrive, and three hours after it was due a badly wounded man rode into town on an exhausted horse to tell the horrible story.

The people on the stage had been massacred by a band of Indians just thirty miles east of Denver City.

Jim Reed and Elaine were alone when someone brought in the news, and as soon as Jim heard what had happened he threw back the covers of his bed and sat up.

"Bring me my clothes, Elaine," he ordered.

Elaine turned toward him. Her face was very pale. She shook her head. "No, Jim. No."

"Bring me my clothes," he said again.

"What are you going to do?"

"The Indians around here are friendly," Reed answered. "That was either a band from some other part of the country or, if it was Indians from around here, someone has put them up to it. I'm going to find out why that stage was stopped, Elaine."

"But—but you're not supposed to get up, yet. The soldiers can take care of it, Jim. Why do you have to go?"

For a third time Jim Reed said, "Bring me my clothes," and for a moment Elaine stared at him. Then her shoulders slumped and she turned away to get them.

He dressed swiftly. This was one thing he had never anticipated, but since an Overland Mail Stage had been in-

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volved, it became his problem to discover why.

Elaine walked with him to the door and there she said, "Will it always be like this, Jim?"

"No. Not always."

"Sometimes I wonder," she murmured.

But Jim Reed hardly heard her. He was already planning what he could do and his kiss when he left her was almost casual.

WHEN he reached town, men were standing in groups around the street and rumors were on every tongue. Jim learned that a troop of soldiers, temporarily stationed at Denver City, had ridden out toward the scene of the massacre. He turned toward the livery stable. On the way he passed the building which had housed Nan Scott's restaurant. It was still closed and at the door he hesitated. Nan hadn't yet left, he was sure, and an almost overpowering impulse to go in and see her came over him. He wanted to hear her voice, look into her face. But he put the impulse aside and walked on to the stable.

He was ten miles east of Denver City and it was just turning dusk when he met a group of five soldiers returning. With them there was a ten-year-old boy. The boy's face was tear-streaked and dirty and his eyes were bloodshot.

"This lad escaped," one of the soldiers reported. "He was on the stage but apparently under the body of his father and mother and he kept still when the Indians rode up after the shooting was over."

The boy looked at Jim Reed. "They wasn't Indians," he said, dully. "At least, not the two I saw."

"What?" gasped the soldier. "Why didn't you inform us of that before?"

"You didn't ask me," said the boy.

"Were they white men?" Reed asked.

The boy nodded. "One of them looked just like the man who drove the stage."

"Whitey Morrison was on the stage," one of the soldiers said. "He was killed and scalped."

Reed had known Morrison. He recalled him as a large man, broad of shoulder, red-faced. There were hundreds of men who would fit such a description.

"What are you going to do with the boy?" he asked the soldiers.

"Take him into Denver City. The colonel said that he would find someone to care for him when he got in."

"I'll look after him," Reed offered.

He turned and rode with them back to Denver City and on the way he asked an occasional question of the boy, but there wasn't much more that the boy could tell him. He seemed bewildered, dazed by what had happened, and when they neared Denver City he started to cry. One of the soldiers carried him the last few miles in his arms, but at the barracks, Reed took him.

"Tell your colonel, when he comes in, that I've got the boy," he said. And then he rode on down Blake Street.

He took the boy straight to Nan Scott and as he knocked on her door he thought, "I shouldn't be taking the boy here. There are a dozen other places where I might better take him. It's just that I want to see Nan again. It's just an excuse." And while he waited for Nan to answer his knock he wondered if she would see through the request he planned to make of her as clearly as he did.

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He didn't hear her footsteps approaching the door but suddenly the door opened and she stood there staring out at him. She didn't seem at all surprised, but a faint frown showed on her forehead and continued there until Jim had explained why he had come.

"Will you look after the boy?"

"Of course, Jim," she answered, then as she bent forward to stretch out her arms for the boy she caught her breath and looked up at Jim. "Your wound," she gasped. "It's started bleeding."

Jim Reed stared down at the front of his shirt. Blood was beginning to stain one side of it. The ride had been hard on him. He felt tired, a little lightheaded. But he said, "That's nothing, Nan."

"You rode out there to where the stage was ambushed?"

"Only part way."

"What are you going to do now?"

Reed glanced at the boy. He thought of what the boy must have experienced and a sudden, deep anger swept over him. He said, grimly, "I'm going to finish something I should have finished a long time ago."

Nan didn't ask what he meant. Perhaps she guessed. At any rate her face paled and she whispered, "Must you, Jim?"

He nodded, turned away and started toward the Golden Nugget saloon. Half a dozen paces from Nan's door he looked back. He could see the white of Nan's dress and the darker figure of the boy standing beside her. A smile twisted his lips. He raised his arm and waved.

FROM the moment when he entered the Golden Nugget saloon, Jim Reed knew that Death had come into that room with him. He could sense its presence at his shoulder, feel it in the sudden tenseness about him. A few paces in front of the door he stopped and he saw men turn away from the bar and look at him and more men move away from the gambling tables and back up against the wall.

Beyond the end of the bar, at the table where Nan Scott had been seated when he had come into the saloon many days before, Harry Kimball was now sitting. Joseph Porter was at the same table and next to Porter was Jack Chaffee. There were two other men there, men Reed didn't know. Slowly he began to walk forward.

In the back of his mind he puzzled a little over the silence which had fallen over the room. He couldn't see himself. He didn't know that his face was pale and drawn and that a cold anger glittered in his eyes or that his march forward was so deliberate that some of the men there must have guessed what he planned to do. But the silence suited him. It fitted into the background for what he had in mind. And when he spoke his voice, low and steady, carried to every corner of the room.

There was an instant hush.

"Kimball, there was a boy on that stage which was stopped today, He wasn't killed. I've just talked to him. He saw the Indians who rode up after the firing was over, and after the man who reached here had escaped. He saw them, Kimball, and they were *white!*"

Kimball stared at Reed. He stumbled to his feet, moistened his lips and then cried, "Why tell me about it? What do I know?"

Jack Chaffee stood up, started to edge away. The two men Reed didn't know got to their feet. Only Joseph Porter did not move from his place

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but sat where he was twisting his hands together nervously.

Reed's glance swung to Chaffee. He said, "Stop, Chaffee. Don't try to run out on this yet."

Chaffee stopped. His hand started sliding down toward his gun, then ceased. "I didn't have anything to do with that massacre," he said huskily. "I was north today. Up near Ute Bluffs."

Reed's lips twisted with scorn. "Will you face the boy?" he asked, flatly. "Will you let him see you?"

Chaffee stared from side to side and what he saw in the faces of the men there in that room must have bothered him. Some of the miners were muttering angrily and from near the door a voice called, "Get the boy, Reed. These men'll face him, an' if they're the white Indians there's a cottonwood tree down the block an' plenty of rope in Davidson's store."

Reed nodded. He said, "I'll get the boy," and turned toward the door. But even as he turned he saw Jack Chaffee's nerve break and saw the motion of Chaffee's arm as it whipped down toward his gun. He drew his own guns, then, and threw a bullet at Chaffee. Chaffee's body jerked backward. He reeled against a chair, stumbled over it and sprawled to the floor.

But Jim Reed didn't see that. He had turned back to face the other three men. Kimball's face was contorted by fear. He was breathing heavily and perspiration stood out on his face. There was a wild, desperate expression in his eyes.

Reed said, "It's no use, Kimball. If you—" And then his voice broke off for Kimball had sprung behind one of the other two men and, jerking out his gun, had started firing around the man's body, one of his arms clutching the man's waist.

FROM behind him Jim Reed heard someone scream in agony. He saw the man behind whom Kimball had taken refuge try to twist aside but Kimball seemed to have the strength of a giant. Reed charged forward. He clubbed his gun, smashed it against the head of the man in front of Kimball and then, reaching over that man as he fell, he hit Kimball in the face.

Kimball staggered backward. He tried to lift his gun but couldn't make it. He turned, started to run but Reed tripped him, and then the crowd of men in the room surged forward and Reed felt himself pushed aside as the angry miners jerked Kimball to his feet. They tore his clothing from his body and made ready to haul him outside to the cottonwood tree.

But Jim Reed stepped forward again before they could get Kimball out the door and, blocking their way, said grimly, "Just a minute. Kimball's not the only man. Who else was involved in it?"

The miners urging Kimball forward halted. One of them struck Kimball across the face and said, "Well, speak up, you white Indian!"

Kimball started whimpering. He would have fallen if the men hadn't been holding him up. He began to beg for his life and then, after another blow across his face, he gasped, "It wasn't my idea. It was Porter's—Porter's an' Jack Chaffee's. I—I only helped out. I—"

Some of the miners turned back into the room and seized Joseph Porter. They dragged him forward.

Porter's face was pale and he was trembling, but when he faced Jim Reed and stared into Reed's eyes he

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straightened and made a desperate effort to control himself.

Reed felt as though an iron hand were twisting his heart. He thought of Elaine. He told himself that what was happening couldn't be true. But one glance at Porter's face was enough to tell him that Kimball hadn't lied.

"Porter," he said, and there was an earnest plea in his voice. "You weren't in this, were you? You weren't—"

Joseph Porter drew a deep breath. He said, "Yes, Jim. Chaffee and Kimball and I are the guilty men. It sounds funny to say that about myself. I never thought that I would. I guess that a man never thinks that he'll do a thing like I did, and when he does he never thinks that it'll be discovered."

The men holding Porter started to shove him forward but Reed said: "Wait a minute." Then he asked heavily, "Why, Porter?"

"Money," Porter answered. "Money breeds a liking for more money. When I heard that Berthoud Pass wasn't possible for the railroad I tried to buy up around Cheyenne, thinking that Denver City would move that way and that I could sell the lots at quite a profit. But a Cheyenne land speculator beat me to it. Then I hit on the notion of Ute Pass, and met Chaffee."

"There isn't any Ute Pass?"

"No."

"Were you with the men who stopped the stage this afternoon?"

Porter nodded. "Yes. There's no way out for me, Jim. Sending the mail through Denver City was holding people here. We wanted to stop it. We got some Indians to help us. We wanted to make the route through Denver City too dangerous."

One of the miners swore. He said, "That's enough. Let's get this over with." And another said, "Don't try to stop us, Reed. They've got it comin'."

Jim Reed looked at Porter. He heard Porter say, "Jim—about Elaine. She didn't know what I was doing. Will you take care of her after—after I'm gone?"

Jim Reed nodded his head. "I'll look after her."

And then he stood aside while the miners urged Kimball and Porter out of the saloon. Kimball was whimpering and crying, Porter was silent and trying desperately in these last moments of his life to keep his head up and to meet his fate, unafraid.

VII

JIM REED didn't follow the silent crowd of men down to the cottonwood on the banks of Cherry Creek. He turned, instead, toward Nan Scott's restaurant and he found the girl waiting for him at the door. He thought that an expression of relief came into her eyes as she looked at him but he wasn't sure. He looked quickly away from her and told her in swift sentences what had happened.

"And so that's the story," he finished. "There never was any Ute Pass. Ute Bluffs was promoted by Porter and Kimball and Jack Chaffee as a money making proposition and they tried to block sending the mail through Denver City to break the spirit of the people who lived here so that more of them would be ready to move away. I guessed what was going on weeks ago, but I had no proof. I had no proof tonight, but Chaffee's nerve couldn't stand the strain and he broke when I accused them."

He stopped talking and leaned against the door. Nan Scott had turned down the lamp. When he looked

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toward her, her face was in the shadows, and for a long time she didn't speak. The silence grew between them and then, from down the street, Jim Reed could hear the trample of returning feet and the distant murmur of voices. The cottonwood tree had a burden now.

He stirred, pushed himself erect, knowing that he must go, and then he heard Nan saying, "Jim, it's hard to be brave, isn't it."

He nodded. "Yes, it's hard."

"I don't want to be brave, Jim. I haven't from the very first. I have people in St. Louis, a home to which I can go. I didn't need the money I could get for this restaurant. I just stayed here because—because—"

Her voice broke off and Jim Reed clenched his fists. He thought, "All I would have to do is step forward and take her in my arms. That would settle everything. We could go away together or we could stay here. It wouldn't make any difference so long as we were together." And suddenly he was trembling and his knees felt weak and his heart was thumping so madly that he thought surely the girl must hear it. Then, between him and the shadowy figure of Nan Scott swam the face of Joseph Porter and his last words echoed in Jim Reed's ears.

Reed put his hands in his pockets. He said, stiffly, "Goodbye, Nan. There's something I've got to do."

The girl caught her breath. She moved forward so that he could see her face and, though there were tears in her eyes, she was smiling. She put out her hand to him and said, "Goodbye and good luck, Jim. Always."

HE turned away and walked with heavy feet out toward Joseph Porter's cabin and in the front room he told Elaine what had happened and of his part in it. He didn't tell her what her father had said just before the men took him away but he tried, in so far as he could, to paint a brave picture of her father's death. And at the end of his story he said, "But things like this are soon forgotten, Elaine. We can go away for a while, maybe go someplace else, for the West is big. Or we can go back East if you like. There's just you and me—now."

Elaine was sitting in her father's chair. She had taken it better than he would have thought possible but now she looked up at him almost startled and he heard her ask: "You would marry me after all this?"

"Of course," he said. "What has happened couldn't be helped—can make no difference." And then, looking into her eyes he told her steadily, "I love you, Elaine."

A smile came momentarily to her lips and she whispered, "Jim, I'll always remember how you said that."

"You'll hear it many more times," he promised.

Elaine stood up. "Thanks, Jim. And now will you go? I think I'd like to be alone."

"I can come out tomorrow?"

She nodded. "Yes. Tomorrow."

Jim Reed returned to the Denver House. He thought of the job he had undertaken. It was finished, had been finished promptly and efficiently, but he could feel no satisfaction in what he had done. Several of the men who had visited him in his room almost a month before were at the Denver House now to compliment him on his work. They referred to the phantom Ute Pass and Reed knew that they were disappointed that was a myth.

"But the railroad will come this way," one of the men predicted. "We'll

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find a route over the mountains and, if that isn't possible, someday we'll find a way under them. The battle's only started but we've won so far."

Reed nodded and out of the confusion of his own mind he seized on that man's enthusiasm for the future of Denver City. *"Over the mountains or under them,"* he murmured. And then the doctor came in and took a look at the wound in his side and dressed it and put him to bed.

IT was Sandy Turpin who woke him the next morning, and the sun, then, was almost directly overhead. Turpin had just come in on the stage from Clear Creek canyon.

"Had yourself a great time last night, didn't you?" he commented.

Reed said, "I don't yet understand Porter's part in it."

Turpin shook his head. "Sometimes there's no accountin' for things like that, Jim, exceptin' greed. Greed's made a sinner out of many a saint. But Elaine's turned all his money over to a committee of men here in town. She wants it paid back to the men who boughts lots in Ute Bluffs. She's a great girl. But I didn't know she had folks up north. Did you?"

"Folks up north?" Reed echoed.

"She just took the stage north."

"You mean Elaine Porter?"

"Sure I do. An' by the way, she left a message for you. She said for me to tell you goodbye an' when the time came to wish you an' Nan the best luck in the world."

Jim Reed felt tears coming into his eyes. The wave of happiness which had at first swept over him was tempered by the memory of Elaine as he had seen her the night before.

Turpin stepped up to him and laid a hand on his shoulder and said, "Jim, don't feel too badly about Elaine. It's wiser this way, better for you an' for her. Love's something you can't force. It's like gold. Gold's either in a rock or it ain't. If it ain't there, the rock is just a rock, an' if love ain't in two people they're better off to realize it. Now get your clothes on. Nan doesn't know Elaine's left."

Jim Reed drew a deep breath. He started to dress while his mind leaped ahead over the years and he said to Sandy Turpin just as he was leaving. "Sandy, we'll build a great city here someday. Nothing can stop it. It's in the cards." And as he went out the door he wondered why Sandy thought that what he had said was funny. But he didn't worry about that very long. It was only a few steps over to Nan Scott's restaurant.

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Winter Flight

By JACK R. BEEHAN

IT WAS one of those clear, beautiful nights when you can see ten beacons ahead—a hundred miles. We were at eight thousand feet over northern Oklahoma, the engines purring like two well-fed kittens. Sam Benson was flying, slouched in his seat with his elbows on the armrests, his feet light against the rudder pedals, looking relaxed and calm as he always looked, his cap tilted on his head and the earphones clamped across it.

My call light came on. I leaned over to Sam and yelled, "Back in a minute," and went through the door and down the long aisle. Most of the passengers were sleeping. But Phyllis was not. She was sitting in the last seat on the right, her reading lamp turned on and her hat off. She was smiling.

"You again?" I said. Then I tried to look very severe, which I could not do, and said, "Now listen—this is no longer funny. Since Chicago I've chased back here three times."

Her eyes were bright and amused. "I'll bet you weren't doing a thing, up there. And I just love to push buttons—don't you?"

"You're nuts," I said. The seat across the aisle from hers was empty; I sat down on the arm of it. "But now I'm back here, so I'll take up the subject again—when will you marry me?"

She spread her fingers and bunched them, gathering up little folds of her skirt. She did this two or three times, watching the effect intently.

"It's *when,* now, is it? The last time, it was *would* I?"

I put my hands on the armrest of her chair. "All right, then, will you? Phyllis, I love you. You know that. Don't you know that, by now?"

"I think you've hinted at it vaguely, a couple of times," she said lightly With one slender finger she touched the back of my hand, pushing down on the large vein, and lifting her finger to study the discolored spot. Then she looked up. "Peter," she smiled, "you're lots of fun, and I like you."

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"Oh," I said. "So I inspire a beautiful sisterly affection, do I? Now that is just wonderful!"

Quickly she put her hands over mine. "Oh, you!" she said chidingly. "I've known you three whole weeks! I've got to—"

"It doesn't make any difference how long I've known you. I know how I feel. So what? So—"

"Peter," she interrupted me quietly, "it's not something to get mad about."

"Nuts!" I said. I got up, trying to grin. "And listen, you—don't you push that button again, just to see me run down this aisle."

I WENT forward again. The night was just the same, beacons winking through the darkness in a long chain ahead, the stars just out of reach. But all this was not beautiful anymore. I felt miserable, inferior, jealous. There were at least two other men—pilots—in love with Phyllis Dugan. One of these was Sam, beside me, big and likable, for all his peculiarities,. The other one was Artie Fox, hard-boiled and romantic. After all, I reasoned, why should Phyllis give a thought to me?

Phyllis Dugan was the niece of Scott Crawford, who was operations manager of Sky Routes, Inc. But she did not get her job as supervising dietician for the line because of that. She got the job because she could handle it—because she was smart, and had gone to school and learned what she needed to know, and then had gone into a hospital and learned more. She got the job because she was so attractive. She had a vivid personality and a charm that made everybody like her instantly.

Of course, with a job like hers, she flew a great deal. Sky Routes, Inc. was a big airline. Phyllis had to inspect kitchens in a dozen cities every month, she had to argue with chefs about food—kind, quality, quantity, preparation, packing.

She had been with Sky Routes about six weeks. I had met her three weeks ago, one night when we had had to land at an intermediate field in bad weather. It was snowing ahead of us, and sleeting behind. We figured we could go on in three or four hours; it was not worth while to try to get any sleep. But the passengers preferred to go in town, and we sent them; then the crew—Artie Fox, the pilot, and Ann Barnes, the stewardess, and I—built a fire in the beacon house. Phyllis stayed with us, and we sat and talked most of the night, drinking black coffee and nibbling sandwiches. With the wind howling outside, and snow tacking steadily at the windowpanes, we felt very friendly and snug.

Artie Fox was a veteran with the line, a guy about five-eight, but very broad-shouldered and powerfully built, with black hair and a little black mustache and a booming bass voice. He was known all over the system as a ladies' man. He was handsome, I suppose, although a little on the crude side, to my way of thinking. In his earlier days he had been an amateur prize fighter, and he still put on the gloves once in a while. He liked to kid people; if he ribbed you and you were a good sport about it, he liked you—but if you got sore, he would rag you to death.

I noticed the way he kept watching Phyllis, and I could almost see what he was thinking. But I was surprised by the way he treated her. He didn't kid around, as I expected; he was very attentive and polite. He told some of his experiences, and they were pretty funny, and some were quite exciting. Phyllis was fascinated—I could see that. And as the night wore on, it didn't take a very keen perception to understand what was happening. Artie wasn't just making a play; he was serious.

I didn't like that, because I had never met any girl in my life whom I liked so much in so short a time. And Ann Barnes, who was in love with Artie herself, saw all this too; she didn't like it either. She was usually a noisy girl, full of humor, but when one or two of her conversational gambits had been received coldly by Artie she didn't say anything more. She looked as if Artie had slapped her; she wrapped her arms around her knees, and stared at a little red spot of flame she could see through a hole in the stove.

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After that, for some reason, it wasn't very much fun. Nobody said much. I saw Phyllis studying Ann; then, whenever Phyllis would be looking at Artie or me, Ann would be watching her, kind of narrowly. Phyllis sat on an empty box by the stove, small and sturdy, her brown hair fluffed out and glinting under the light that spilled down from the ceiling. She was lovely.

Well, we did not get away from that field in three or four hours. It ended up that we were there four days. After daylight we went to town, and everyone slept until mid-afternoon, and then we got together again. Artie and I shared a room, and he kept talking about Phyllis.

"Boy," he said, "she's a swell dish!"

"She's a nice girl," I said.

"Listen," he said, "I'm working on that. You and Ann go out and shoot buffalo, or something."

I was only a co-pilot, so all I said was, "Ann may have her own ideas."

Artie said, "That rattle-brain."

THE result of this was that all four of us teamed up together. Artie would not let Phyllis out of his sight, and Ann would not let Artie out of hers, so we just milled around. The four of us saw "It Happened One Night" three times, and we spent hours sitting in the little drug store café drinking hot chocolate and coffee, and we taught the girls to play Kelly pool. It continued to snow. The wind blasted down across the prairie, and we were buried in that town.

But by the fourth evening the weather was getting better, and Artie had to be at the telephone office for an hour or two, getting orders from Scott Crawford. The snow had stopped. Phyllis and I bummed around for a while, and then we got into the high overshoes we had bought and went for a walk. We walked out the main street, and down a country road. We wore mittens and held hands, our footsteps silent in the new snow, our breath writhing up in clouds of frozen mist.

It was about nine o'clock when we came back. For a mile neither one of us had said anything; it did not seem necessary to say anything. The wind had stopped, but you could hear it whispering in the high bare limbs of the few trees. The overcast had thinned, and a watery moon was trying to pierce through the breaks. Right at the edge of town, I stopped. Phyllis stopped. We stood there in snow that came halfway to our knees, facing each other. A queer kind of fright had come over me—fright, and excitement. I could feel my heart beating.

"Phyllis," I said, and my voice sounded rough and unsteady; "Phyllis, this will probably sound screwy to you. But I've got to say it. I love you." I kissed her before she could move.

She remained perfectly motionless. When I let her go, she still did not move, but stood there, her eyes searching my face in the faint light. I felt suddenly flustered.

"You shouldn't say that, Peter," she said.

"Shouldn't? I can't help it! I do!"

"Peter—"

I never found out what she had meant to say, because just then, a block down the street, I heard Artie Fox yell. I looked, and caught sight of Ann and him plowing through the snow toward us, passing under the street light. Artie was yelling, "Hey, you two! Where you been? Front and center! We're taking off for K. C."

SO WE flew back to Kansas City, and after that we each had work to do. I did not get to see Phyllis until two days later, when she came into Chicago. And that was only a glimpse, at the airport, for I was due out on my run, with Sam Benson.

Phyllis was with Artie Fox, and Sam was standing there with them—closer than he had been to Artie, voluntarily, in months. Sam hated Artie; and it was mutual. But they stood there now, trying to hide that animosity by totally ignoring one another, by being pleasant and attentive to Phyllis while trying to exclude each other completely from the conversation. It was really funny. Phyllis, of course, knew all about their violent feud. She was keeping a good

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poker face, but when I looked at her and winked, I thought that she would break out laughing.

I am not sure just how the feud between them started, but it was Sky Routes' private war. Sam Benson was a big guy—six-feet-two. He had flown for fifteen years. His hair was just as thick and fiery red as it had been the day he soloed and his face was long, and placid—but he wasn't placid. He had a quick, violent temper, and there was a peculiar thing about him when he got worked up, or sore: his voice did funny things. It had a trick of leaping up an octave to a kind of unexpected yodel. He was extremely sensitive about that. If you wanted a quick punch on the jaw, you could just make some wisecrack about Sam Benson's voice.

That applied to everyone but Artie Fox, and once it had applied to him. But Artie was a boxer; Sam, although six inches taller and with twenty pounds to his advantage, could not hit the smaller man. He knew he couldn't hit him—he had tried.

Usually I went out on a run with Sam the same night Artie Fox was coming in—so that the two planes passed each other in the air. If we were flying in thick weather, and the trip had been a tough one, Sam would be showing the effects of strain. Invariably, when he was very tired, his voice would break that way. And when it did, if Artie heard it on the radio, Artie would come back across the air with just one word, sung out in a falsetto register, with all the stinging mockery and derision he could summon:

"Yoo-hoo."

I don't know why that always burned Sam up so badly, but it did. He would slam the microphone back on its hook, and sit there cursing. The remainder of the trip was ruined.

It would be no use to try to put down all the things that they had done to one another. They were always fighting, not with fists, now, because Sam had come to know the futility of that. But in other ways, ways that pilots have. Their hatred grew, until they would not remain in the same room with each other; they never spoke; meeting, as they had to in their work, they glowered at each other. It had been a very interesting thing to watch.

I came back from that run, and Phyllis and I had a very exciting evening at the midget auto races. The next day I went on my vacation, to Arizona to visit with my folks. I came back, two weeks later, and called Phyllis on the telephone.

"Peter!" Phyllis cried. "Well, it's about time you came back! I want to go out for a nice, quiet evening. I don't want to hear guttural threats and dire promises. Peter, I'm so *glad* to hear your voice again!"

I bumped my head against the wall. Evidently I was conscious. I said, "I've flown fourteen hundred miles today, but that won't seem half as far as the three miles to your apartment. I'll be there in an hour."

"Peter," Phyllis said regretfully, "not tonight. I've got a date. Tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night I go out on my run."

"To Dallas?"

"Yeah."

"Then I'll tell you what," Phyllis said. "I should have gone to Dallas last week, but I didn't. I'll go tomorrow night. We'll take in the whole town."

"Darling," I said as steadily as possible, swallowing my heart, "I love you. You think of that, tonight."

SO HERE we were, riding south through northern Oklahoma—and I had just asked Phyllis to marry me, with negative results.

She did not push that button anymore, but as we were droning high above the Oklahoma hills, the cockpit door opened, and she stood there in the semi-darkness. That was before the regulations came out about visitors up front.

"Are you boys having a good time?" she asked.

"Better, now," Sam said. "You should have thought of this before."

For a hundred miles or so, we talked. We showed her all the gadgets in the cockpit. She was fascinated. Then, after a while,

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she made some parting wisecrack, and went back to the cabin. We were nearing Dallas—the glow of it was a thin halo in the blackness a hundred miles away—and I turned on the overhead light in the cockpit so that I could check my forms to see that everything was balanced up.

And when I did, I saw a little notebook lying on the floor. Not thinking anything, I picked it up, opened as it was. There was a page of writing in a precise hand. But I did not notice the kind of writing until I had already seen a few things that were written there:

Pilot Hawthorn looks slovenly. Shoes not polished, uniform wrinkled. Bad impression on passengers.

The plane on Trip 1-22 very dirty. Pilots Stevens and Gray; Stewardess Burns.

On Trip 4-23, Co-pilot Merton not sufficiently patient with unreasonably inquisitive elderly lady.

My eyes passed over those items almost at a glance. There were others, but I did not read them. I was shocked. I felt sick with disappointment. Because I understood, suddenly, why Phyllis Dugan—Scott Crawford's niece—spent so much time on the line. She was checking food, perhaps—but she was evidently checking and reporting everything she saw.

Feeling a cold numbness in the region of my stomach, I got up and left the cockpit. Phyllis was sitting there in that last seat, apparently asleep. As I leaned over and turned on her reading light, she raised her head, and smiled, and said, "Hello, Peter. This is nice."

"Is it?" I said grimly and I tossed the little notebook in her lap, open just as I had found it. I said, "A snooper, eh? A pretty little company spy! Well, thanks for the ride. I'll get off there, if you don't mind."

As I turned away, I caught the look of incomprehension that was stamped upon her face. Her lips parted to say something, but I did pause to hear it. Back in the cockpit, I said, "Sam, let me fight this crock a while." I tried to concentrate upon the job of flying, on the instruments, on the lights that were sprinkled like tiny fallen meteors upon the ground. But I could not stop my thoughts. There was just one emotion that I felt: I felt heartsick.

In Dallas, when Sam had pulled up to the ramp and I went back through the cabin, Phyllis had already left the plane.

I SLEPT all morning, and then got up and fought a battle with myself; I won it; I did not call Phyllis. I dressed and shaved and went out to a show, alone.

That evening, in the lobby, I bumped into Lou Hall, the stewardess who had come down with us the night before. She was a tall, frail girl with a pretty face and big, sad-looking eyes. Only, they were not sad-looking now; they were snapping, black like spots of glittering obsidian. She was sitting there, her knees crossed, one leg kicking up and down in spiteful rhythm.

I grinned, and said, "You certainly look violent! Nice kitty! Scratch your back?"

"Pete Rathburn, you can go to hell!"

"How about some food?"

"Food!" she said.

"A drink seems indicated. Two drinks." I waited a second. "Three," I said.

"All right, three. Only choke that chatter, can't you? I'm not in the mood."

In the middle of the third drink, she set her glass down hard and said, "Pete, I could kill her! With my hands. Like this—" She made a motion.

"Fine," I said. "Who?"

"Who!"

"No kidding, who?"

"That Dugan brat!"

"You?" I said.

"Do you know what she did, the hussy? I have a date with that idiot Sam Benson for tonight. And he breaks it—she calls him up and he breaks it and takes her out instead. I tell you, I could—"

"Lou, it's time we had another drink," I said.

Well, in the next three days a lot of things happened. I saw Phyllis several times, but Sam was always with her. We didn't go back to Chicago on our run. The

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weather got bad in a very odd way—our schedules could fly southbound in the early evenings, but the early morning schedules northbound could not go. A windshift—a "cold front" in the terms of didactic meteorologists—hung stagnant on a long line that lay north of Dallas, covered Kansas City with glaze ice and sleet, and turned northward there to rest just west of Chicago. Chicago had a ceiling of a hundred feet. Ships coming south could pull up, get on top and ride securely toward Dallas, with unlimited ceiling to shoot at. But northbound planes could not get into Chicago.

Usually, when something like that happened, Scott Crawford canceled trips both ways. But this time he was somewhere on an inspection tour, and the dispatcher in Chicago figured that the weather would be better in a day or two, and let the southbound fly. For two nights the southbound flew, putting ships in Dallas that could not get back, because the weather did not clear. And the third night, when Chicago finally broke open a little, Dallas closed, with rain and fog and a nasty mess that hugged the ground.

All this precipitated a very lovely little situation: it put Sky Routes in a position where it had no spare equipment in Chicago to cover runs that could be flown—that must be flown. The Post Office Department has a neat, effective way to deal with lines that get caught in that predicament: the P. O. levies fines. It does not say, as it deducts your money, "Now let this be a lesson to you," but the idea is implied.

SO THERE we were, airplanes scattered all over the system, down in Kansas City, down in Tulsa, down in St. Louis—locked tight in those places by the sleet and rain. Airplanes in Dallas that should be in Chicago. Chicago with good weather—for all the good *that* did us—and dispatchers up there tearing out their hair in handfuls trying to find Scott Crawford on the telephone.

They found him, that third night, when he walked unexpectedly into the Dallas hangar. He didn't know that anything was wrong, till then, and then he didn't get excited. This thing was going to cost his company a two-thousand-dollar fine, if he didn't get an airplane in Chicago by eight o'clock the next morning, and it might cost him his job before the less benevolent of the directors finished with him. But he approached the matter with efficiency and calm. I was out there, loafing with the hangar crew, so I was in on all of it. Crawford sat down at the thudding weather teletype machine and ripped off one of the yellow sheets that had those pessimistic figures on it. He studied them a moment, and then looked up at Dorne, the night dispatcher.

"What pilot's due out first?"

"Benson."

"Get him," Crawford said. "Get Benson, and get the second pilot who's due out. We'll send them up together, and the second pilot will be there to protect that run tomorrow morning with this ship."

I thought, "Oh-oh!" Because the second pilot due out of Dallas was little Artie Fox.

But there was too much pressure around there just then to let a small thing like personal differences mess things up. Dorne got busy, and within an hour Sam Benson came into the office, big, red-headed, his cap tilted on his head. And with him was Phyllis Dugan, looking like a doll against his greatness. Sam and Crawford went over to the teletype machine. Phyllis stood there. She looked at me, and I could not tell a thing that she was thinking because she wore that poker-faced expression again.

"Hello, Peter," she said, low, almost in a whisper.

I said, "Hello."

Crawford was snapping questions at Sam all the time. Then he said, "Don't stretch the point, but do you think you can get through?"

Sam grinned. He said, "Sure I can. I could have last night, but some dumb dispatcher canceled me."

Crawford turned to Dorne. "Have we got passengers?"

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"Some deadheads down here want to get back to Chicago," Dorne said. "And we'll have a load of mail."

"Get going," Crawford snapped. Then he turned to Phyllis. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"Trying to deadhead to Chicago," Phyllis said. "I've been trying to get back for two days." Standing there, her hands pushed deeply into the pockets of her coat, she looked adorable.

I had to clench my fists behind my back, hold them there until the muscles ached, to keep from putting my arms out for her to walk straight into.

Having come out of Chicago with Sam Benson, naturally I was going back with him. I got my forms together, and stepped outside to wait for the hangar crew to dolly the plane onto the ramp. The low overcast cloaked the black sky ominously. The field lights reached up through drizzling rain and made a sickly yellow halo against the lower mist. I stood there, shivering. The rain was clammy on my face, the wind stung through my clothes.

From the hangar came the sound of the immense steel doors sliding back, and then, a moment later, a tractor emerged with the big twin-engined silver ship in tow. Under the lights, with the night so black beyond, it looked tremendous. For a minute I got my mind away from Phyllis, away from my own miserable emotions, thinking that in a few minutes Sam and I would be up there in that cockpit, poking that blunt nose into the drenching, inky clouds, climbing . . . climbing . . . searching nervously for the top of a freezing overcast.

Searching for something that wasn't.

Then Sam came past me, clearance in his hand, and ran out to the plane. I followed. Just then I saw a taxi pull up to the hangar door, and Artie Fox and Lou Hall got out and went inside. Five minutes later everybody was aboard—Phyllis, and Artie, and Lou, and a young accountant who was deadheading. The mail and a few hundred pounds of company material were loaded. Engines blaring, Sam pulled out onto the field and checked everything with his customary thoroughness. Then he gunned the plane down the long runway and up into a night as black and sticky as the inside of a tar barrel.

IT WAS just a routine flight, of course, a little off our usual schedule. Sam stuck that nose up at its highest rate of climb, taking all the power he could get out of those engines. At five thousand feet we started getting ice. Now and again the stuff would spin off the propellers and crash against the fuselage with a sound like shrapnel on a sheet-iron roof. For a few minutes it was a question whether we would make it, with that increasing load of ice. But at last we got on top of all the overcast at thirteen thousand, and leveled out. I could breathe again.

It was cold up there. Yet our outside-air thermometer did not show that, for a while—there was a coating of ice on the bulb from coming through the clouds—and so I did not cut down the amount of air circulating through the heating system. Sam and I both had our earphones on and through them the steady off-course of the Fort Worth beam came in as we plowed northward. When we were out not quite an hour, we knew that we had come out just in time: Dallas now had moderate freezing rain, as that "cold front" moved across.

It was just before the radio broadcast that I noticed how cold it was becoming in the cockpit. I pushed the heat control down all the way. This plane had a steam boiler; you could always keep it warm. The outside air thermometer, I was surprised to notice now, showed almost zero.

That's cold in anybody's language.

And then, a little later, I was worried to discover that it was still getting colder in the cockpit. About that time Lou Hall came forward. "Are you guys hibernating?" she demanded. "You're about to freeze us out, back there!"

"You've got all the heat there is," I said.

"I'll check the boiler. Maybe it's run dry."

So I got up, and took the water can and tried to fill the boiler. It was then that I

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had discovered just what had happened.

The boiler was not dry. It was frozen—frozen tight.

I couldn't believe it. On top of everything else this final blow was too much.

I stood there for a moment, trying to think. Because I knew what we were up against. We couldn't thaw that boiler out. We couldn't go back to Dallas and get down. We had to go on—on to Chicago. And as we went on, the temperature would continue to get lower. We would probably have to go to sixteen thousand feet—or seventeen or eighteen—to stay on top of this far-flung icing overcast, and at that altitude we would encounter temperatures as low as thirty below zero.

I wasn't frightened solely because it was my fault. The thing that frightened me was the thought of sitting up here, helpless, while we froze to death. We had seven or eight hundred miles to fly—we had at least four hours of this slow ordeal before we could get down.

I didn't begin to believe that we could last four hours—or even three. Two would be the absolute tops. And two hours wouldn't be enough.

THE first thing I did was to shut off the main ventilator, in order to save what heat we had. Then I told Sam Benson what had happened, while Lou Hall stood there and listened, her mouth open.

A lot of times I had seen Sam Benson sore, but this was the first time I had ever seen him frightened. His ruddy face got pale. He looked at me, and then down at the instruments, and back at me, his lips compressed.

He knew a frozen boiler couldn't be thawed out.

"Can you get back into Dallas?" I asked thinly.

He shot me a look.

"Not a chance!" He swallowed. Then he started snapping orders at Lou Hall. There were eighteen little laprobe blankets in the plane. Sam wanted eight of them up here. In that type of plane there was a draft that came in around the pilots' feet, and already the cold was stabbing into us. We worked quickly, silently, wrapping those little robes around our feet and knees.

"This is going to be a tough one, kid," Sam said to me.

We were just beginning to feel the first really numbing effects of the cold, when the cockpit door opened again, and Artie Fox came in. Artie touched me on the shoulder, and said, "Get up, Pete. It's warmer, in the cabin. Wrap yourself up and try to keep warm for fifteen minutes and then come up and relieve Sam. Sam can get warm and relieve me. We've got to work this thing together."

That was the smart way to work it, of course.

Sam, glowering at Artie, snarled, "Get out of here. I can't stand the smell."

Artie's fist clenched, and for a second I thought he was going to sock Sam for that insult. Then his hand relaxed, and above the purring of the engines, his voice came steadily, "Sam," he said, "do you realize what you're up against?"

"Get out!" Sam roared. "I'm skipper of this plane."

My heart did ugly flipflops at that. Sam's pride was going to wreck us yet.

A twisted grin came over Artie's face. "I ought to leave you up here—let you freeze your feet. Listen, Sam, I used to push airplanes in Alaska so I know what cold can do to you. This cockpit will be down to twenty below zero in another hour. You've got three hours still to go. You freeze your feet real good and you'll lose 'em—then what happens to you as a pilot? Then you're through! Pete—let me sit down."

I got up and Artie took my seat. Sam ignored him. But Sam was cold—I could see him shivering. He was suffering already. I went back to the cabin, walking on numb, stiffened legs.

I was pretty wobbly.

Back there, Phyllis was wrapped up in blankets, huddled in her seat. Lou Hall sat opposite her. Henderson, the accountant, was bundled heavily, across the aisle.

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He was coughing; he had just spent a week in bed with flu, and he wasn't standing this so well.

I could feel that Phyllis was staring at me. But she didn't speak and I held my eyes away from her. My pride, I guess, was just as bad as Sam's—and it hurt me just as much.

I sat down and took the two small robes available and tried to fortify myself against the cold.

But it was no use. My feet were already beyond hurting, but my legs ached terribly. I couldn't keep from shaking. The blankets didn't seem to help, because my body was so cold already that there was no heat in it to preserve, it seemed. At the end of ten agonized minutes I got up and went into the cockpit and motioned Sam to get up and go back. He gave me a thankful look, and, when Artie took over the controls, swung his armrest back and tried to stand.

It was only then, I think, that he realized how serious our situation really was. Because he was so numb with cold that he could not hold his weight upon his legs. A surprised look, a look of utter incredulity, came into his eyes.

"Help him out," said Artie.

But I knew it would do no good to help him out. He would not get warm, in the cabin.

The trouble was that he was much too cold already.

"Listen," I told Artie. "Maybe this is crazy—maybe it won't work. But it's worth trying. Turn on the radio transmitter—press the mike button and wedge it down. The tubes will heat up, and I'll hold blankets around the transmitter, get 'em hot and bring 'em for Sam's feet."

Sam had to get heat from somewhere, soon—and no fooling.

Artie frowned. "We've got two hours and a half more of this, at least," he said. "We'll all be frozen before then, if that stunt doesn't work. Get going!"

THE radio transmitter was in the extreme rear of the fuselage. I had to go back through the lavatory, through a door from there into the baggage compartment, and through another door from that before I could get to it. The transmitter tubes were glowing in the darkness, sending shafts of light against the bluish metal walls, and there was precious heat radiating from them. I wrapped blankets around the case, and stood there, shaking violently. When the delicious warmth was at its maximum, I rolled the blankets quickly and hurried forward. I lost a lot of heat, of course, but the blankets were still fairly warm when I stuffed them down into the others that encased Sam's legs.

He stared at me, nodded, then smiled gratefully as the warmth crept into him a little.

"Thanks," he said.

"Better?"

He said: "Sure."

So after that, going back again, I yelled at Lou and Phyllis, and we worked together. Every three or four minutes we would take hot blankets to the cockpit. We were freezing, ourselves, but this was no time to think of that. I think all of us realized by this time what would happen if we let Sam and Artie get too cold. They would reach a point of helplessness, when they could not fly the plane. I might drag one of them away from the controls and fly myself, but I would hurtle downward from this thin and frigid sky. So we worked in desperation, frantically.

It must have been an hour later that Lou dropped into a seat, worn out. But Phyllis and I did not stop—we did not dare. We tossed Lou two blankets, and kept grimly on.

It was harder now.

I had to admit, in those infrequent moments when there was time for thought, that Phyllis was a thoroughbred. She did not flinch. The time came when my legs were mere stumps on which I hobbled, but I knew that she was just as cold, or colder, and yet she kept right on, her face flushed with the burn of that bitterly cold air, her eyes dulled by weariness and strain.

After we had been hurrying to and from

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that cockpit for what seemed endless hours, we met for a moment in the transmitter compartment. Blankets were piled upon the case, and we had to wait for the precious heat to saturate them. Phyllis stood there, so exhausted that she was swaying on her feet.

I don't know quite what happened to me, then. It came over me suddenly that we could not keep up this pace much longer, that we both would drop. Seeing her that way, so exhausted that her body seemed to sag, a stab of pain went through me. I realized then that we might not, perhaps, get through; that this terrific cold night after all defeat us. And when I thought of that it made things different.

"Phyllis," I said, the trembling of my body making my voice shake, "I can't bear to see you like that! I've gone right on loving you—even since I saw those notes of yours."

She lifted her eyes, and even that seemed to be an effort. "But I never reported anybody," she said weakly, her voice lifeless. "I made notes on things I meant to tell people—when I got to know them well enough." Then she gave me a faint smile. "You didn't give me any—chance to—tell —about—"

Suddenly her legs would not support her. She fainted in my arms. Somehow, I got her forward, into a seat, and wrapped her in three of those hot blankets.

AFTER that, I worked alone, waging a fight that seemed entirely futile. Sam and Artie were suffering the torture of the damned; their hands and faces were frostbitten; their legs were so numb that they could not tell if they were frozen.

But just when I thought I could not continue any longer, that it wasn't any use, we ran out above the shelf of overcast, and started down. But the air was not immediately much warmer; at ten thousand feet it was still zero; at five thousand, when we were seeing lights through wide breaks in the clouds, it had come up to twenty-two above. At Chicago, little Artie took that big plane in. Sam Benson was too paralyzed from cold.

We all spent a few days in the hospital from shock and frostbite, and Sam had a badly frozen toe. He and Artie lay in the two beds of a double room, and the story is that Sam was telling a good-looking nurse just how he got there, and he got excited and his voice betrayed him. The story is that Artie looked over and sang "Yoo-hoo" softly—and Sam only grinned and thumbed his nose.

I wasn't there, so I don't know if that is true.

But one thing you would probably like to know, that I can tell you. Phyllis hasn't got that job with Sky Routes any more. But she's still a dietician. She's the dietician for the Peter Rathburn family, now.

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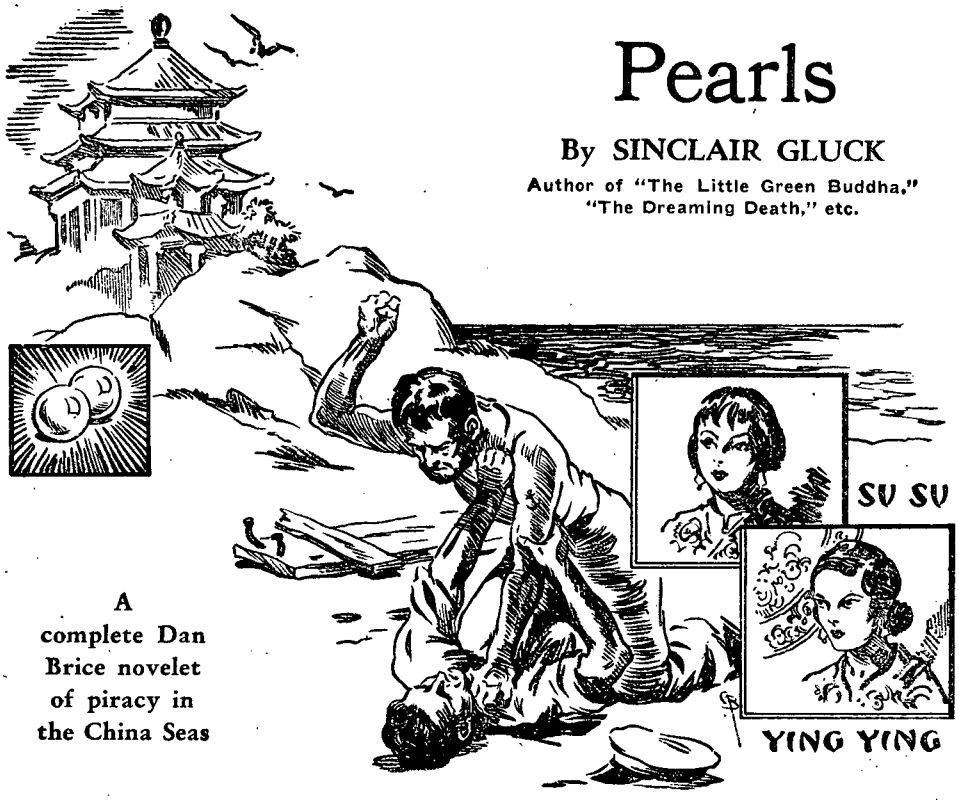
Pearls

By SINCLAIR GLUCK

Author of "The Little Green Buddha," "The Dreaming Death," etc.



A complete Dan Brice novelet of piracy in the China Seas

I

BRICE saw the movement out of the tail of his eye and checked in mid-stride. The knife whizzed under his rugged chin, so close that he felt the wind of it.

He spun and crouched, a .32 automatic in his hand as though by magic, his lean, hawk-face savagely intent. The narrow, winding alley was deserted, lined with dark doorways as far as he could see along it. He straightened. The knife-thrower had made his attempt from the shelter of a projecting sign, a painted lattice-work of thin bamboo strips like a Venetian blind. There was no one behind it now.

Sam and Tiny ran up, swearing. "Come on!" growled Tiny. "*This* time we'll mop up!" His huge shoulders were hunched, bulging with muscle. His big head swung like a grizzly, and his little eyes glowed hot under the low, scowling forehead.

"Nix!" said Brice harshly. "They'd get *us*, in that lane." He crossed the narrow street and wrenched the knife from a door-post. It was a cheap knife, with a blade eight inches long and razor sharp. Chinese characters had been scratched on the haft. Brice studied them. Roughly translated, they meant: *Death to man-killing white devils.*

Loiterers had begun to collect; porters, beggars and Cantonese seamen. Brice nosed the little gun back into his pocket and stuck the knife thoughtfully into his belt, eyeing the bystanders. One of them was whispering and grinning evilly at Tiny's rage. His glance met Brice's quiet, black eyes and the grin faded. Without a word, the three ex-devil dogs fell naturally into step and swung forward, brushing the Chinese aside. The crowd muttered, but did not follow.

Brice and his two-man crew marched up

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from the Kowloon waterfront in watchful silence. They were not mystified. The only puzzle about this latest attack was the identity of the knife-thrower. It was easy to guess who had hired him.

Among the well-informed in the Orient, both whites and Chinese, the ex-marine sergeant had made a name for himself as a daring, brilliant and trustworthy adventurer. He had tricked and captured a powerful, bandit war-lord for the Nanking Government—at a price. He had bought and delivered the famous Emerald Buddha out of war-torn Shensi Province against the efforts of both sides to recapture it, also at a price. But his most recent exploit, undertaken with no idea of profit, had led them almost to disaster.

Three weeks since, Brice and Sam Placer and Bert—"Tiny"—Huckle had raided a sing-song boat, killed the son of a government official and rescued the innocent Chinese girl whom he had kidnaped and was trying to assault. They had taken back with them two frightened young slave girls, Su Su and Ying Ying, leaving them at Huckle's boarding-house.

Later, to save the kidnaped girl and her father from a disgraceful death, they had shelled the bund at Nanking and blown the murderous official to rags. The official, Chew Men-sang, was the head of the Chinese secret service, and belonged to a rich and powerful family. Having killed him, neither the justice of their cause nor powerful friends in the government could make Shanghai anything but a death-trap for Brice and his buddies. Practically ordered to do so by a friendly government official, they had slipped away south to Hongkong for a while on Brice's armed tug, the *Mary Jane*.

Most of their expeditions led inland, to places reached by water and not by rail. The armed and armored tug had played an important part in their exploits up the great Chinese rivers. But with her hatches battened and her thick, high-silled doors closed, the *Mary Jane* was staunch enough for the open sea in anything short of a typhoon.

Now the ex-marines were returning to their hotel, after their usual daily visit to the anchored tug. The knife-throwing was the third attempt on their lives in two days. As leader, Brice had insisted on walking ahead today.

HE TRIED to get ahead of them now, but Sam and Tiny kept pace with him. "To hell with that stuff," Tiny grumbled.

Sam chuckled, his eyes roving. "Check! After this we'll walk abreast. Most likely they'll hit Tiny and then we can shoot 'em. Slack off, Dan."

They reached one of the main streets and gained their cheap hotel without incident. The fat Chinese proprietor was sound asleep behind his little desk. Sam tied his queue to the back of his chair, while Tiny eased a lighted cigarette into his clasped fingers. Then they tiptoed upstairs.

Dan Brice was unlocking their door when he checked suddenly and waved the others back. "Anybody could walk up here with that fat Chink asleep," he muttered. "Watch it."

He turned the key, flung the door open and jumped aside. Nothing happened. He peered around the door, then went in disgustedly, Tiny and Sam at his heels. A knife like the one in his belt stood upright in the middle of their unvarnished table. The deeply buried point skewered a piece of paper to the table top. This time the Chinese characters were on the paper instead of on the haft of the knife.

At the sideward jerk of his head, Sam and Tiny went in to explore the adjoining room. They found nothing disturbed. They returned, searched this room and stripped the two beds in it, but found nothing. Brice had translated the characters.

Sam draped himself across the two arms of an alleged easy chair. "What's the message this time?" he asked lazily. "Love and kisses?"

Brice was comparing the knives. "That's right," he smiled absently. "The characters mean: *It is said that Death is everywhere. Those who flee him in the North will meet him very surely in the South.* That's telling us."

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"It's real elegant, too," Sam yawned. "This chewing-gum man that Tiny kind of distributed must have had a lot of pals or relatives or something. They try to shoot us or knife us first, and then warn us. Anyhow, we know who it is."

"Wish I c'd get me hands on 'em," mused Tiny, flexing his huge fingers. He dropped across the bed.

"Yeah, we know who it is," said Brice. I've known all along. There's just one male adult left in the Chew family. That's Chew Men-sang's brother, Chew Ti-hung—"

"Then all we gotta do is catch this tea-chewer," said Tiny comfortably, "an wring his neck."

A dim yell echoed his words. The yell was followed by a thundering clash. All three men smiled.

"Fat Sow," observed Sam mildly, "has woke his little self up. Now we'll get some service around here."

The service developed almost at once in the form of a resounding bang on their door. The ex-marines covered it automatically with their guns. Brice called: "Enter!" in standard Mandarin, the official tongue of all China.

THE door crashed open to reveal the panting and furious proprietor, See Lee. "Ha hi!" he snarled. "Which American devil knot honorable hair, place cigalette inside hands belong See Lee? What hell? *All* get out too quick!"

"What is this?" demanded Brice gravely in Chinese. "When we return, mountainous See Lee is found sleeping like weary bridegroom. His respectful guests creep upstairs like young brides who dread to wake their lord and master."

See Lee took refuge in furious Chinese, black eyes glittering. "This person thinks his respectful guest tells many-sided lie!" he howled. "No one else in this humble inn uses small smoke sticks! Be pleased to go hence quickly."

"Ha!" Brice advanced ominously. "Who sleeps in the open invites devils," he quoted a Chinese proverb. "Must we be those devils? Moreover, See Lee has left the quarters of his guests unguarded while he slept. Was it with the knowledge and approval of See Lee that one entered here while he slept and left—this?" He showed the knife-slit, in the table, then exhibited the first knife with the characters scratched on the haft. The other he held behind his back.

See Lee took the knife and read the characters.

"Oh, humble inn, indeed," said Brice coldly. "The proprietor leaves threatening messages for his guests, then feigns sleep, then invents some tale of being bound and hurt, so that he may see the result of his threats. Truly, such an inn must be reported at once to the police."

"Police!" stared the bewildered See Lee. "No, no, exalted personage! There is a mistake! I have not seen the knife or entered these apartments—"

"To enter, or to send one to enter," said Brice sternly, "is all one! You sought by means of threats to extort a sum of money from inexperienced foreigners! Clearly this is a matter for the police, guilty proprietor!"

"No, no! Have mercy!" See Lee got down awkardly on his fat knees. "They will put me in durance and steal all! This person is innocent, but they will not believe! Remain here without expense, as my guests, noble foreigners, but do not send for the police! It means ruin to my family!"

Brice hesitated, and eyed his friends solemnly.

"The wicked See Lee begs for mercy," he explained.

Sam Placer frowned. "Aw, let him go, this once."

See Lee understood. Almost sobbing his thanks, he scrambled to his feet and departed.

"You're a wonder," Sam grinned. "How'd'ja do it?"

"He feels bad about that knife," said Brice. "He wants us to stay as his guests. So we might as well accept."

"Fat Sow monkeyed with us and burned his fingers," chuckled Sam. "And I could do with a drink."

Tiny let out a booming: "Haw! Haw!"

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of laughter "Mean we're gettin' the rooms *free?* That *calls* for a drink!"

"Shut up," growled Sam in disgust. "You're always thinkin' about your stommick. Ain't you fat enough now?"

"Well, aint *you* just said—" began Tiny, outraged. "Aw, go hug a duck, you skinny baboon!"

"It's funny," Brice observed, "that Chew Ti-hung's killers tried three times —and missed us every time."

"All Chinese are lousy shots," said Tiny comfortably.

Sam shook his head. "That ain't it. Nothing can harm me, because my heart is pure. Wish we had Su Su and Ying Ying here. They're nuts about me. Ying Ying kids Tiny she likes him, but that's just the old oil."

"You're a cockeyed liar and so was your old man," Tiny grumbled. "Ying Ying says you look goofy to her."

"Yeah? How'd she tell you that, you poor, ignorant slob? Deaf and dumb language? She don't look *at* me that way."

Brice looked at them both, and yawned.

II

THE three were getting ready to go out and eat when there was a timid knock on their door. It was See Lee. Nervous when he opened the door, the sight of their leveled guns reduced him to a shrinking jelly. He held out a letter.

"There is no evil intended my guests," he quavered in Chinese. "One has brought a writing for the white man."

Brice took the letter and studied the envelope. The upper left corner was decorated by a crooked steamship battling enormous waves. Under this appeared:

Taiwan Straits Steamship Company

The envelope was addressed in pencil to: *Mister D. Brice Esquire.*

"You read English?" asked Brice sharply in Chinese.

"No, revered guest," bowed See Lee. "The writing was left by a small, white dev—man, who said it must be delivered to your nobility at once. Hence this person came—"

Brice waved his hand. "Enough, O man of tricks!"

See Lee backed out, his fat jowls quivering. Brice slit the envelope with one of the Chinese knives and warily dumped out the contents. It was a folded letter. He picked it up, opened it and read:

DEAR D. BRICE, sir,

Hearing that you are in city, your name well known to us. We have a little job that might interest you. Whether so or not, kindly meet our agent H. Jenks at Green Jade Bole Cafe at one sharp this afternoon, and oblige. Keep this confidential.

Yours respectfully,
Taiwan Straits S.S. Co.

"Here's something," said Brice, and read it aloud.

"Fair enough," Sam nodded. We'll all go—and no walkin ahead, Dan. Come on. It's pretty near one now."

Brice hesitated, frowned, and led the way down to the street. They eased outdoors, alert and formidable, their hands near their guns. When no attack developed, they walked on.

They knew about all there was to know about the Green Jade Bowl restaurant. Located on one of the tiny cross-streets of Kowloon, it was a shady retreat in every sense, with dim lights, dimmer booths and good cooking. Crooked deals were planned in its concealing shadows. European husbands and wives held assignations there, but not with each other. A few richly dressed Chinese dined there, inscrutably silent. It was demure and expensive, and much larger than it looked from the outside.

In the obscurity of the Green Jade Bowl one girl and at least three men had gasped their lives out—and been found elsewhere. With death already at their heels, no place could have been more dangerous to the three ex-marines. But it is the instinct of the hunted fighting animal to come to grips with its attackers. They recognized and accepted the danger with a mutual, savage impulse that needed no discussion.

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On the way there, Brice fished up from a retentive memory what few details he had heard about the Taiwan Straits Shipping Company, or Steamship Company. As he recalled, it was a small, coastwise freight service, owned by a *hong* or syndicate of Kwangtung Chinese merchants, but officered by down-at-heel Americans and Britishers who knew only too well how to get the most out of native crews. A tough lot, he had heard. There were dimly remembered stories. . . .

THE typewritten note looked as if it had been picked out with one finger by an illiterate white man. Some of his richest and toughest jobs had come to him from stranger beginnings. They all needed a job right now. This idle waiting for death to strike from any corner had begun to have its effect on even their steady nerves.

The layout of Kowloon is peculiar. They had been following one of the streets which rayed down to the waterfront. A turn brought them into sight of the Green Jade Bowl. Brice paused to let the others catch up with him.

"If you pretty near close your peepers now," he muttered, "you'll see quicker when we get inside."

They entered the cafe abreast, paused in the dim lobby, filed into the main room and eased aside, studying the place. Even for the noon meal it was thinly occupied. The suave Chinese manager appeared before them, looked them over and fixed his impassive eyes on Brice.

"Welcome, gentlemen." He bowed slightly. "This dilection, if you please—"

They followed him until Brice saw an alcove-booth better lighted than most of the others. He waved Sam and Tiny into it, and followed. The proprietor missed them, returned and silently beckoned a pretty, Chinese waitress in pink trousers and tunic of watered silk. Then he repeated his slight bow and left them.

The girl smiled at them with friendly shyness, left the embroidered mats on the European table, but collected the ivory chopsticks.

Brice ordered lunch and highballs for all three, in grave Mandarin. Her eyes darted to his face and her manner became subtly deferential. She bowed gracefully and withdrew.

At once Brice ran his eyes over the paneled wall at the back of their booth. It looked solid enough. His elbow rapped it carelessly. It sounded hollow and thin, but close inspection revealed not the smallest crack in the paneling.

"Keep an eye on this wall," he whispered to Sam, and turned to search the dim restaurant with his eyes. The few occupied booths in his range of vision held couples entirely concerned with each other, their profiles unchanging.

The girl returned with silver knives and forks and their highballs. As she moved away, a man loomed suddenly at the end of their table, planted his fists on his hips and looked them over, his legs well apart like a seaman.

He was a giant, with small, brilliant-blue eyes set deep and close together in a heavy face. Massive shoulders filled a white officer's tunic to bursting. The drill was soiled and open at the bull throat. Clipped, straw-pale hair bristled all over the dirty-pink scalp.

Brice returned the stare calmly, although one glance had narrowed his eyes and lifted the hackles at the back of his neck. The man's coarse, heavily seamed face was burned dark red by the sun. A day's growth of blond beard glistened on the bulldog jowls. The top of his right ear had been shot away, leaving a cup-shaped blob of gristle. An old scar lifted one corner of his stained mouth in a perpetual, ugly snarl.

Sam kept his eyes on the wall. Tiny growled very softly, deep in his throat. The man heard it and shifted his gaze. At once his bright, hard eyes glinted, measuring Tiny's bulk in speculative challenge. Then he looked at Sam.

"Which of you guys is Brice?"

"Who are you?" asked Brice.

The blue eyes flared, and shifted. "Name of Jenks," came the hoarse growl. "You Brice?"

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Brice nodded. "Si'down, Jenks. Have a drink?"

Sam was against the wall, with Brice next him. The newcomer eased in beside Tiny, dropped on the creaking bench and squared his elbows. "Don't mind if I do, gents. The same as you got is good enough fer Harry Jenks."

Observing the grimace that was obviously meant to be a genial smile, Brice read craftiness in the brutal face. Part of that savage challenge masked cunning, but not all of it. Jenks was a coarse animal, but no fool—which made him dangerous.

"Sam Placer," Brice indicated, "and Bert Huckle—Harry Jenks." He looked away to beckon the girl.

JENKS nodded at Sam and then at Tiny. His hard eyes lingered on the brawny giant at his side, their challenge now veiled. Tiny spread his own elbows on the table with a click of bone meeting bone as their arms collided. Jenks stiffened, then shifted to make room. His eyes dropped, missing the quick frown that Brice shot at Tiny.

The girl brought a fourth drink and more silver.

"Here's to crime," suggested Brice. "Drink hearty."

The four drained their glasses and set them down. Jenks wiped his mouth and bellowed his order at the girl in rough pidgin English. He ordered chow mein and four highballs. The Chinese girl bobbed her head, unsmiling and frightened.

Jenks swung to face Brice. "A neat bit of goods that, but I'd make her jump if she worked for me! So you got the firm's letter, huh?"

"We're here," said Brice. "What's on your mind?"

Jenks stuck his jaw out and lowered his voice. "It ain't my doin'," he rumbled. "The T-Triple-S Company figger they c'n use you blokes. They've heard about *you*, Mr. Brice. I seen your tub offshore. It don't look much, but, hell, that's your look-out."

Brice waited. Puzzled at first, he had decided that Jenks was an Australian. But the fellow must have knocked about a lot, for his argot held all the freedom of the seas.

"It's like this 'ere," Jenks continued. "One of our lousy iron-tramps came south last month with a cargo of grain and Chinese wax. But her skipper—name o' Trask—had something else aboard." Jenks paused to grin reminiscently.

"Something funny?" Brice suggested in a bored tone.

Jenks shook his big head. "I was thinkin' o' Trask. I sailed with him once. Tootsie Trask, they called 'im. He used to hang up lazy hands by the toes—hang 'em out like washing, he did, in the old days." Jenks sighed regretfully.

"We've heard that one," said Brice.

"I dessay." Jenks looked down. "Well, these bloody pirates've got spies all over the shop. They got wind o' what Trask 'ad aboard. That's 'ow it looks. Anyways, they must'a signed on with Trask, maybe a dozen of 'em, fer the 'ome vi'ge. So one night, about four bells in the midwatch, they took over the ship, see? Way it looks, they battened the sleeping crew in the fo'c'sl, cat-footed up on deck and chucked the watch overboard. Then half a dozen of 'em swarmed up on the bridge."

At this point, the little Chinese girl appeared timidly with their four highballs. She served Brice and the big, blond seaman, then leaned forward to serve Tiny and Sam. As she set down their drinks, Jenks ran his hand down her back and pinched her viciously, then grinned at her jerk and gasp of protest. *"Chow mein fetchum kwai kwai!"* he rumbled.

The girl writhed aside with tears in her eyes, and pattered away. Jenks picked up his drink with a satisfied curse. "That's the way to make them babies jump!" he said.

Tiny winked at Sam. "The guy's tough, huh? Bet he can lick his weight in wimmin."

"Skip it, Tiny," said Brice. "Go on, Mr. Jenks."

For some reason Jenks ignored the chal-

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lenge, though he reddened and clamped his bulldog jaw. After an instant he relaxed and drained his highball. Brice waited, calm-eyed.

"Business afore pleasure," said Jenks with a glance at Tiny. He smacked his lips and banged down his glass. Then he leaned forward, dropping his voice to a low rumble.

"Well," he muttered, "old Trask had a sound Mister under him—name o' Larkin. He had the deck that night, and he seen the Chinese afore they got *to* him, did Larkin. So he drops a couple an' grabs the whistle cord. They must'a knifed 'im proper, but he was clamped to that whistle when the life went out of 'im. An' it woke up the skipper."

The girl had returned with bowls on a lacquered tray. She placed them, standing close to Brice, her pretty slant eyes avoiding Jenks. The big seaman grinned and put his arm out

"Keep your hands off her," said Brice quietly.

Jenks stared and reddened again, his huge fists knotted. Nothing physical could daunt him, yet there was a deadly calm in the American's steady gaze that found him unprepared. He grinned sourly, and looked down at his bowl.

"Aw, these Chink gals want clouting," he muttered.

At the same instant, the little waitress whispered very softly to Brice in Chinese: "Do not eat, kindly one—"

Brice picked up his fork and thrust it idly into his bowl of Huo Kuo Tzu. The faintest tremor run up his arm. He lifted the fork—

"Hold it!" Sam exploded.

Brice looked down. Impaled on his fork was a live scorpion of the deadly, brown species found in India. Shreds of food dropped from its body and claws as the curled tail stabbed and stabbed at the tines through its back.

WITH a blistering curse, Jenks thrust at the table and sprang clear of the booth. Dishes and glasses cascaded into Sam's lap. Brice slid from under, his hand like a rock. Well clear of the others, he dropped his fork and set his heel on the writhing brown body. Sam and Tiny were out of the booth in a flash, swearing softly, their hard eyes on Jenks. Sam had jumped and come down on his heels to shake the food from his lap. Luckily, his bowl and Tiny's held no scorpion.

"What a help *you* are!" Sam was staring at Jenks.

"It took me by surprise!" Jenks bellowed.

Brice drew his gun. "Stow it!" he said thinly, "and watch yourself." He started for the back of the restaurant.

The affair had passed so quickly that no one had seen what happened. People in other booths stared at the four men in puzzled interest, sensing a fight. The more alert proprietor met Brice within three paces, saw the gun in his hand and confronted him with unmoved calmness.

"Please to shoot weapon outdoor," he requested.

Brice took his arm and showed him the crushed scorpion. "In my food," he said in Chinese. "This person wishes to know why. Lead us to the cooking place. We follow."

The proprietor looked, turned silently and led them to the kitchens. Sam followed Brice. Tiny remained to glower at Jenks, measuring and measured by the big tramp officer.

There were two Chinese cooks and three little waitresses in the kitchen. At a flood of Chinese questions, the cooks began searching the cupboards, then peered outdoors.

One of them explained. Not ten minutes since, a Chinese boy had offered to wash dishes for merely his food. The chief cook had accepted. Now the boy had vanished.

Brice glanced at his waitress, but did not speak. She pattered forward timidly. "This person saw the boy disarrange the Huo Kuo Tzu of the kindly foreign one," she murmured. "That boy threatened death if this maiden spoke. It might have been —an order—" She faltered and stopped.

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"It was no order!" scowled the proprietor.

"Nor any fault of hers," Brice interrupted dryly. "From what is spoken of this place, it might have been an order. Let harm come to this maid and the police shall hear that in this place one may dine on scorpions! Enough. This person is satisfied. Let us return."

To the glum amazement of Jenks the three ex-marines reoccupied the same booth, as soon as the little waitress had cleaned up the mess. Brice had summoned the proprietor again.

"Once is sufficient," he explained. "No doubt, our anxious host will supervise—and be responsible for—the preparation of our dishes. It is said that a man of peace among bandits may hang by the neck as well as they."

The unruffled proprietor smiled, bowed and withdrew

Brice looked up at Jenks. "You're safe enough now," he said absently. "Sit down and spin the rest of the yarn."

Jenks grinned and eased into the booth alongside Tiny.

"Fair startled me, that did," he admitted. "Men I can handle, but not them insecks. Well, as I was sayin'. That whistle rouses the skipper and he slips through to the bridge in the dark. He sees the Chinese knifing his Mister and he guesses why. Old Trask knows them waters. Bunch o' little islands thereabouts. So he takes a quick sight overside—"

Jenks paused for effect. Getting no reaction, he rubbed his thick nose and went on. "Sure enough, they's a big junk without lights slippin' alongside. Trask hears one screech from the engine room and knows the chief's a gonner, too. So he ducks back in his cabin fer—what he's got there. The junk's to port. Trask's slippin down the starboard companion when they spot him and start slingin' knives. One of 'em gets 'im in the leg, but he makes a clean dive overboard."

"With what he had in his cabin," said Brice dryly.

"Not 'arf," Jenks growled. "I'm a-comin' to that. Well, Trask spots the lift of a island by starlight and 'eads for it, swimmin' 'ard on account o' the blood 'e's losin'."

HE BROKE off as the girl appeared with a tray, the Chinese proprietor hovering in her wake. She set down four highballs and their fresh food repeated. Jenks looked up at her threateningly, but did not touch her. When she and the proprietor left them, he leaned forward again.

"Meantime," he resumed in a low rumble, "the Chinese pirates get aboard and carn't find Trask. His cabin locker's open, so they figger he's gorn overside with—what 'e 'ad—"

Brice yawned. "Where were *you* all this time?"

Tiny was drinking, but managed to snigger insultingly.

"Me? I weren't aboard 'er! I'm Mister on the *Canton Belle*. I'm tellin' you what 'appened that night." The first mate's voice was surly, yet curiously placating.

"Go ahead," said Brice, exploring his food.

"Well, the bloody Chinese figger Trask is in swimmin', so they locate a bunch o' distress-flares an' touch 'em all orf at once. The light blinds 'em, so they carn't see 'im at first. Not till 'e makes the island." Jenks grinned. "He's in his little white nightie, see, an' the light picks it up. Anyways, they spot 'im. They blow a 'ole in the ship's bottom an' tumble aboard their junk, to 'unt down Trask—"

"With the crew locked in the fo'c'sl," muttered Sam.

"O' course," nodded Jenks impatiently. "They was all lorst exceptin' Trask. Nobody knows what 'appened to the chief an' 'is second. Anyways, they wasn't picked up."

"So Trask was picked up on land, was he?" drawled Brice. "Funny how the papers get things mixed."

"Oh. You read about the sinkin', did you, Matey?"

"The *Shangai Belle*," nodded Brice and began to eat.

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"The papers said Trask was pulled out o' the water," grinned Jenks. "But that was just 'is foxiness. 'Old fast, an' I'll come to that part. Well, the flares didn't 'elp the Chinese much. But they was a British destroyer cruisin' orf them islands. She spots the flares an' crowds on steam in a 'urry. Afore long, 'er searchlight picks up the junk an' the sinkin' *Shangai Belle*. You know all that, huh?"

"What the papers had," said Brice. "You tell it."

"Right. So the destroyer opens up on the junk at long range, 'opin' to scare her orf more'n hit 'er yet. The Chinese ferget all about Trask and 'ead fer shallow water to get clear, where the destroyer carn't follow. They know them islands like the back o' their 'ands.

"Meantime, Trask 'as climbed the island. lookin' fer a place to 'ide what he's got. It aint 'igh. So he finds a kind of old temple and 'ides the stuff. 'E's figgerin' on takin' to the water again, afore the Chinese get him and start slicin' 'is stommick to make 'im give up where he's 'id the stuff. Only the other side o' the island's too steep, see? It's a cliff. So he ties up 'is leg an' runs down the same side. An' then 'e spots the destroyer. She's stopping fer survivors, so he swims orf to 'er. An' she picks 'im up."

"But he doesn't mention the stuff?" asked Brice.

"Not 'im. The destroyer-commander's in a hurry to 'unt down them pirates. The *Shangai Belle* 'as gone down by this time. Even with the searchlight 'e carn't find no more survivors. Them Chinks don't leave none as a rule. So orf 'e goes to locate that junk."

As Jenks grew more intent on his story, his hoarse voice had fallen more into the Cockney dialect sometimes found in Australia.

"Well," he continued, "settin' course by Trask, that commander weren't no lubber. 'E knows them waters, too. So 'e steers roundabout fer 'is draft, figgers wind and time, and combs them islands, usin' his searchlight slow an' careful. When 'e don't find no junk where she ought to be, 'e crowds on steam an' 'eads fer the mainland.

"Sure enough, close on dawn, 'e piks up the junk. Then 'e opens on 'er with 'is for'd gun an' blows 'er to 'ell. She goes down with a lotta the Chinese, but some of 'em gets orf in their cock-eyed boats afore she sinks. An' bein' a soft-'earted bloke, the destroyer's commander lets 'em go, paddlin' dizzy-like fer the mainland. The destroyer puts in 'ere with Trask—an' that's that."

Jenks leaned back with an air of expectant triumph.

"You aren't eating your lunch," said Brice absently.

Slightly deflated, Jenks leaned forward again. "Fer Judas' sake, don'tcher get it? That stuff's on the island *now!*"

"It could be," nodded Brice. "So what?"

"Hell." Jenks stared in disgust. "We gotta get 'em back, don't we? An' that's where *you* come in! The comp'ny wants to 'ire you, see? Wants you to get the stuff fer 'em."

"You haven't mentioned what the stuff is yet."

Jenks lowered his voice to a husky whisper, his eyes glittering. "It's pearls, mister! Only two of 'em, but big ones! Trask says 'e never seen 'em that big!"

Brice kept his lean jaw chewing, unimpressed. He sipped his highball and lowered it thoughtfully. "Why can't you stop for 'em on your next run north?"

Jenks grumbled. "Them islands is lousy wif pirates! The comp'ny won't risk another ship *an'* cargo!"

"Don't give me that," said Brice. "They can send the *Canton Belle* or the *Nanking Belle* in ballast. All they got to do is mount a gun for'd and get there by daylight."

Jenks shook his big head. "Steamers in ballast cost money, mister. An'—we aint allowed to mount no guns. We tried it once," he added indignantly. "An' damn' if they didn't as good as call *us* pirates 'cause of a little trouble."

"That was a helluva note." Brice was

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smiling. "It still doesn't make sense, Jenks. It'll cost you money if *we* get the—stuff. I don't get the company's angle. They'd risk mounting a gun, and save money stopping at the island."

Jenks finished his highball and nodded grudgingly. "You're nobody's fool, mister. I aint told you the 'ole of it. Fact is, there's a little question abaht the ownership o' that Trask 'ad in 'is locker. We don't want no song an' dance over gettin' 'em back, see? The company's 'eard you're a bloke as can be trusted."

"They can't trust their own men?" asked Brice.

"Day *an'* night, in the ord'nary way," rumbled Jenks. "But it ain't no good temptin' underpaid white orficers nor yet Chinese crews. Word abaht that stuff got out some'ow. We carn't tell 'oo knows it. They're anybody's loot, see? They're easy 'idden an' easy stole. The comp'ny reckons you c'n get 'em back without no fuss—an' you won't cross 'em on it."

"How much do they offer for the job?"

Jenks almost met his eyes. "One 'undred pounds—a thousand, Mex—if you deliver 'em 'ere. Not a lousy shillin' if you don't. Them's the terms."

Brice laughed. "*Your* terms, Jenks, with a nice cut for yourself. How much does the company offer?"

III

TINY half-wheeled for action as the big mate froze. Sam remembered and kept his eye on the wall. Brice was smiling lazily, though his cold eyes bored into Jenks.

With a visible effort, Jenks relaxed and twisted his mouth into a leer of tolerance. "Draw it mild, mate, when you're talkin' to 'Arry Jenks. *That's* the comp'ny offer."

"We don't know Harry Jenks from Adam," Brice snapped. "You may represent them, or you may not. So I'll just go direct to the company and refuse that offer."

" 'Ere, you carn't do that fer yer own sifety!" Jenks protested. "Them pirates 'as spies everywheres. We're 'opin' the pirates believe Trask fetched them pearls 'ome wif 'im! Remember, a bunch of 'em got away in their boats. They *know* Jenks got to the island with the loot."

"I'll risk the contact to get the company's price."

"Ain't you a card!" exclaimed Jenks with false admiration. "Well, now, I'll tell you. I got authority to hoist that offer to a thousand, gold—two 'underd pounds—on delivery. That's two thousand, Mex—and that's *all!*"

Brice shook his head, smiling. "Now I'll tell *you*. The company can trust me better than I'll trust the company. I'll go for a thousand, gold, or two hundred pounds. But I want half o' that in advance or we don't hoist an anchor. The *Mary Jane* eats oil, and we're no millionaires."

"Now look 'ere—"

"Those are my terms. Argument won't change 'em."

Jenks stared an instant, then hoisted himself to his feet. "I'll ask 'em," he growled and lumbered out.

"Tail him, Sam. See where he goes," Brice droned.

Sam eased past him and walked outdoors with the air of an idle man who has dined well. Tiny leaned forward. "That bloke wants 'is 'ead beat orf," he grinned.

"Be sure you're looking when it starts," Brice said thoughtfully. "And then look out. He'd be a dirty fighter. But don't mix with him, Tiny. Something smells. I want to find out what it is. He's no fool. Let me handle it."

Tiny grunted and lapsed into silence.

In a few minutes Sam returned and slid into their booth. "It's okay so far," he reported. "The big slob made straight for the Taiwan offices and went inside. I waited a coupla minutes, but he didn't come out again."

"Well, okay," said Brice dubiously. "Maybe it's on the level, but that bird 'd pinch his grandma's false teeth."

"Says you an' me both, nodded Sam gravely.

Half an hour later Jenks returned. He

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grunted, slammed down in the booth, glanced around and slapped twenty used five-pound notes on the table in front of Brice.

"There you are, mate. 'Arf in advance," he leered.

Brice counted them twice, felt them, studied them carefully, and at length folded them and put them in his wallet. "They *look* all right," he admitted calmly.

Jenks reddened a little but that was all. He pushed an indelible pencil and a Taiwan Straits S. S. Company receipt form across to Brice. "Bein' as 'ow it's cash money," he growled, "I'll just tike a receipt fer it, Matey."

"You'll get a receipt," Brice stated, "when the teller accepts these notes. I'm a confidin' guy—with my pals."

Jenks looked down. "Fair enough," he muttered.

There was a moment of bristling tension. Then Jenks looked up. "The comp'ny wants me to go along, aboard yer tug," he announced in a surly voice. "I gotta show you where them things are 'idden. An' it'll be a proof o' good faith, like, on both sides. The comp'ny 'as full confidence in you, Mr. Brice. But they don't want nobody to know, until the larst minute, where to find the loot. Even strite blokes like you, they figger, sometimes get soused an' talk too much."

"Oh, you're going along," rumbled Tiny.

"That's right, mate. I'll look arter you, too."

"Oh, yeah?" drawled Tiny, his little eyes hot.

"Yus!" snapped Jenks with vicious readiness.

Brice laughed. "We'll ship you, Jenks. And stow it, Tiny. The passenger's always right." His lean face hardened and his eyes grew frosty. "We'll have no fighting aboard the *Mary Jane*. That goes for you, too, Jenks."

"Oo, me?" stared Jenks. "I'm a peaceful bloke, I am. Like a kitten, if I ain't put upon. When'll I tell the owners you'll sail? Natcherly, they're in a 'urry."

"What's the course, and how far?"

"East by north to Breaker Point, then nor' east by east—matter o' three 'undred forty odd miles all told."

Brice figured in his head. The tug averaged about fourteen knots. Say twenty-six hours, to allow for head-seas and wind, and shallow island waters.

"We'll up-anchor at dawn tomorrow," he said, "and fetch your island after sunrise the next day. Now we'll go to the bank. Then you can report to your owners."

He paid their share of the bill and tipped the Chinese girl generously. There was a branch-bank nearby. They made for it, the ex-marines keeping their eyes peeled without betraying the fact to Jenks. There was no attack on them.

The teller accepted the five-pound notes. Brice had them credited to his Shanghai account and gave Jenks his receipt. Outdoors again, they paused.

"We'll expect you aboard at dawn," Brice told Jenks. "You know where she lies."

Jenks nodded. "Rummy abaht that scorpion, eh, mate?"

"Yeah," said Brice. "Looks like it dropped from the ceiling like they do." He paused. "Well, see you at dawn."

"Aye, aye, mates." Jenks wheeled and strode away, a surly, threatening figure under the afternoon sunlight, in his soiled and wrinkled whites. They watched him lurch out of sight. Unluckily, none of them thought of trailing him this time, to see where he went.

"Anyhow," said Brice at last, "there's no catch about that five hundred bucks. Come on. We got work to do."

FLANKED by the others, he bought an Admiralty chart of Formosa Strait and telephoned a Hongkong shipping-gazette for the latest weather report. It promised fair weather.

They returned to their hotel, collected their duffle and paid their bill with an ominous quiet that had the fat See Lee jittering before they left. He wanted to return their money, but Brice refused.

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They bought enough supplies for a week and had these and their duffle portered down to the water front. As Tiny was always catching crabs with the oars, Sam ferried them and the supplies aboard. When everything was stowed and shipshape, Tiny had steam up. They nosed the *Mary Jane* to a supply-dock and filled her capacious tanks with fuel oil and fresh water.

Back at their anchorage, Tiny cooked dinner and Sam washed up. They arranged watches and the watch below turned in. Well before dawn, Tiny was up and cooking breakfast, his burners roaring and the steam pressure rising in his gauges.

Just before sunrise, Jenks was rowed alongside. He climbed aboard at the waist, dropped his canvas duffle-bag and stared about him, his fists on his hips. Tiny was in the engine room, Brice in the pilothouse, Sam at the steam winch on the foredeck. Brice stuck his head out of the pilothouse.

"Stow your duffle in the cabin," he called. "Had breakfast?" His tone snapped.

"I 'ave," growled Jenks. "Where's your guns? Ain't this tub supposed to be armed?" Brice had drawn his head in. Sam was occupied.

Getting no answer, Jenks picked up his bag and descended to the cabin like a big cat, a surly, confident leer on his face. These bloody Yanks were gonna be easy.

By full sunup the *Mary Jane* was out on the pale ocean, skirting the coast and pushing a respectable bow-wave ahead of her with her blunt nose. Jenks offered to do his trick at the wheel and Brice agreed, merely checking their course from below with a spare compass.

The day passed. Being seamen, all four fell into the routine smoothly, almost without comment. During the afternoon, Jenks invaded the engineroom as though he lived there. He poked about and asked sneering questions. Tiny was no intellectual giant. Under the baiting, he just got hotter and hotter to mix it with the big, ugly slob. But he remembered Brice's orders and kept the peace.

Jenks thought he had Tiny buffaloed, and his own ego swelled accordingly. Over dinner, he regaled them with yarns each dirtier and more pointless than the last. Brice was at the helm while the other three ate. Finally, after a particularly foul and pointless story, Sam got fed up.

'I kinda remember that," he yawned. "It's the one Noah kept telling his wife in the long, rainy evenings."

Jenks thrust his jaw out and half lurched to his feet, elbows out and fists on the table. There he hesitated, scowling into a level stare that was like chilled steel. It took him by surprise. Neither Sam nor Tiny had moved. Yet the vibrant silence was more like a yell of warning.

Sam's thin lips smiled slowly, though his eyes did not. "Si'down, Limey," he drawled, "an' eat your chow."

Jenks slewed his ugly, bright glance on Tiny, and read the leashed eagerness in the wicked little eyes. This was a showdown and he knew it. But he had long since thrown pride overboard as less useful than craft. His stained mouth twisted into a leer and he sat down again slowly.

"Right you are, mates," he growled. "I forgot mese'f. We orter be pals on this 'ere venture."

The other two went on eating in expressive silence.

LATER that night, Jenks took the wheel again. Tiny came out of the engine room, looked all around the dim horizon and cat-footed to the pilot-house. He spotted Jenks by the binnacle lights, eased away unseen in the darkness and found Brice in the cabin with Sam. They looked up quickly.

"What's wrong?" asked Brice.

"Nothin'. Nothin' in sight, either," Tiny growled. "Say, Dan, that Limey's been prowlin' around, askin' all about my coffee-mill. What for?"

Brice shrugged. "I saw him. Thanks, Tiny. Better get back to your coffee-mill. He could lash the helm. And a little emery dust would play hook with your bearings."

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Tiny wheeled and left. Sam grinned.

"It's my guess that Jenks is after those pearls," nodded Brice, "so he won't try anything until we've got 'em. But that's just a guess. Come on, Sam, we've got a night's work ahead of us."

He paused to look at the spare compass which he had set accurately fore-and-aft. They had cleared Breaker Point at dusk. Jenks was on the course—nor' east by east. Brice led the way on deck.

The night was clear and dark, the blind, invisible swells like oil. A light trade blew steadily over the bows, damp and heady with ozone. No light showed all around the faintly pale horizon. Brice walked noisily to the forehatch, certain that Jenks would hear them anyway.

It took them an hour to break out and mount their bow quick-firer. Tiny called the one-pounder his "Barkin' Dog" and had developed an almost uncanny accuracy with it. Brice and Sam lashed a tarpaulin over the gun, but decided against lugging up the usual breastworks of corned beef cases.

They broke out the "Spittin' Cat," a modern machine gun and filled the water jacket. Before mounting it in the stern, Brice slipped aft and called Tiny to watch Jenks in the pilot-house. When they had lashed a tarpaulin over the Spittin' Cat as well, Brice sent Tiny back to the engine-room. He and Sam then lugged up ammunition for both guns, stowed them out of sight in the cabin, closed the hatch and battened down. At least, they were ready for pirates.

With an attention to detail that had more than once saved his life, Brice told Tiny where to find the ammunition. Then he went to the pilot-house, thanked Jenks and took over the helm. "Better get some sleep," he added.

Jenks grunted and went below. He found Sam wearing a holstered revolver and playing solitaire under the dim, swaying lantern. Jenks grinned to himself, bade Sam a hoarse, oily, "Goodnight," and turned in. If they wanted to sit up and watch him, so much the better.

Because of the calm sea and the light wind the *Mary Jane* fetched the island soon after dawn. While it was still a blue lift on the horizon, they slackened speed and ate in relays. All three ex-marines looked heavy-eyed and deceptively tired until they had their coffee.

Brice was at the wheel, with the chart handy, when they neared the island. There was a sort of stone temple on the rolling lift of it, and other buildings, ancient and in ruins, barely visible away to the left where the plateau grew flat. Nothing moved up there in the early sunlight.

Except for a smaller island about ten miles to the south, this one stood alone in an empty ocean. Directly under the temple there was a small roadstead, shallow enough for anchorage. It lay dead ahead.

After studying the chart, Brice put the helm down and began a complete circle of the mile-long island. In fifteen minutes the *Mary Jane* was approaching the roadstead again at quarter speed. Brice had seen no other islands, no sail, not even a feather of smoke on the wide horizon.

Ever since dawn he had tried to rid himself of an uneasy hunch that they were playing into Jenks' hands, doing exactly what he wanted them to for his own obscure purpose. Brice could not guess what that purpose was—unless it was to get the pearls, kill or cripple the *Mary Jane's* crew and escape in her. Yet this would be a sizable job. Jenks was no fool. He knew they were on guard. It was too big a job, unless he had accomplices on the island. Brice had been looking for signs of these, as well as for pirate junks, when he circled the island. And it was for the same reason that he wore his holstered revolver this morning, as well as the small automatic that he carried in his side pocket.

Sam yelled from the bows: "Four fathom! Hold it!"

BRICE signaled *Stop* and *Half speed astern* in quick succession. Sam dropped anchor as the tug stopped moving. They were not more than a hundred feet from the pebble shore. Brice signaled

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Stop. The *Mary Jane* swung lazily by her nose as Sam walked aft. When she had drifted almost parallel with the shore, he let go her stern anchor. This caught at once, holding her in four fathoms.

Brice dropped down from the pilothouse and found Jenks waiting. The big, blond mate had his coat open, showing the heavy automatic strapped under his armpit.

"Not 'arf bad," he growled patronizingly. "She'll de 'ere as she lays. It's gorn low tide. There's the temple."

"Seen it before, have you?" asked Brice casually.

"'Ell, no! But it's like Trask said, ain't it?"

Tiny had lumbered out of the engineroom. He and Sam converged on the dinghy, lashed abaft the deckhouse. It was quiet aboard, now the engines were still, and very quiet ashore. The hoarse pleading of gulls aslant in the sun, and a faint *wash-wash* of pebbles on the beach were the only sounds. Then the dinghy struck the water with a splash.

Jenks spat over the low rail. "Well, 'oo's fer the shore an' them pearls?" he growled, hitching his belt.

"Sam and I'll go up with you," said Brice. "Huckle can stay aboard and keep a weather eye open for pirates."

"Cripes! Your tub's right enough 'ere!" grumbled Jenks. "There ain't nothink in sight. We'll all go."

Brice glanced at him, then wheeled slowly. "You'd better row Sam and Jenks ashore first, Tiny, and come back."

Jenks swaggered to the port rail where they held the dinghy for him, and settled his bulk in the stern. His eyes held a sly, triumphant glitter for an instant before he lowered them to stare at Tiny's big feet.

As soon as they were off, Brice entered the cabin. The dinghy had bumped the tug before he came on deck. He held a rifle under one arm and a tin ration-box in his hand. He got settled in the dinghy, but hung on to the tug's rail.

"Listen close, Tiny," he muttered almost in a whisper, because voices carry over water. "Load the quick firer and train it near the building up above. Watch us. Watch out for trouble from land and sea. Whatever happens, stick aboard the *Mary Jane* and fight off all comers. She's our ace in the hole—with that Barkin' Dog of yours."

Tiny gaped. "What for? What's up, Dan?"

"Jenks. Up to some trick. If I knew what it was I'd tell you." Brice smiled tightly. "Stick to the ship, Bert, and obey orders if you break owners."

"Aw, gimme a crack at the guy, Dan. I wanna slap that grin off'n his face."

Brice pushed off. "If you do take a crack at him, watch your step," he muttered. "He's as big and husky as you are, and it's my guess he's a dirty fighter. Stick aboard. We'll take care o' Mr. Jenks. Get that?"

Tiny shipped his oars and began to row. He caught a crab, bumped his chin and swore sulkily. "Okay! Okay!" he grumbled. "Sure I get it."

"Well, don't forget it! Jenks is up to mischief, and I'll bet it's someth'n slick. He's no fool."

Tiny snorted. As they neared the island he swung the dinghy around and pushed her in on a crest of running foam until her stern thumped on the pebbles. Brice stepped out and waded ashore. Lightened of his weight, the dinghy floated on the next rush of water. Tiny started rowing back to the *Mary Jane,* his hot little eyes on Jenks.

"Thought you was comin', Fatty!" howled Jenks.

"Oh, yeah?" Tiny blared. "You ain't got nothin' to think with, Stupid!" He rowed on, pleased with his own wit.

"That's telling you," chuckled Brice good-naturedly.

Jenks hesitated and wheeled, big head swinging. "Gor' blimey, a rifle, too! Where's the bloody battle, matey?"

"Always take it, in case of skunks," said Brice.

Jenks reddened. "Ho! An' wot the 'ell's

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that?" He nodded contemptuously at the ration-box.

"To put the skunk's ears in, if it's any of your business," said Brice evenly.

Jenks crouched a little, his blue eyes murderous. His sidelong glance found Sam watching him coldly, hand on revolver butt. Jenks straightened joint by joint, his own hand continuing up past his chest to rub his heavy jaw.

Brice had not moved. "Well, do we get started?"

"Why not?" Jenks forced a grin to his stained lips and turned his head to spit. "I 'as a bit o' trouble wif me stomach," he growled. "Makes a bloke fair short-tempered, don't it? 'Ere, mates, I'll lead the way, like—"

THEY began to climb a winding path. It was steep only in a few places, and here rough steps had been cut into the volcanic rock. They looked centuries old. The island was not very high. Jenks spoke only once during the two-hundred-foot climb. Rolling upward, he leered over his shoulder: "Wait till you see them pearls, you blokes! I'll wager you 'aven't never seen nothink like 'em! Plenty o' color, too, by—!"

"Didn't know *you'd* seen 'em," Brice called.

"I 'aven't. It's wot Trask says, mates!" With a choking cough, Jenks added: "Fair w'oppers, fer pearls, 'e says they are. Blimey, you'll see in a minute."

They gained the rolling crest of the island. Brice stared to left and right, where the plateau widened and flattened, encircled by cliffs. The ground was dotted with ruins of small, stone buildings. Men could be hidden among these, but as yet there was no sign of life.

The temple rose straight ahead of them, its black doorway gaping. Built to endure, its weathered stone walls and steep roof seemed intact. The roof was made of heavy, blue tiles with the concave sweep of Chinese architecture.

Ancient, bronze hinges were still embedded in the stone entrance. They were flattened horizontal hoops upon which a great door had swung. But the door was missing.

Brice followed Jenks and Sam into a bare chamber, vast and almost pitch dark after the sunshine. The walls were about twelve feet high, the peaked roof much higher. Spaces between the beams supporting the eaves admitted air, but shut out the rain and almost all the light. There was a yawning doorway at the back, opposite the entrance.

Jenks was breathing hard with excitement. "This 'ere looks like it!" he pointed. "Trask said 'e 'id 'em at the rear, abaft some kind of altar!"

He advanced into the doorway. As Brice and Sam followed, they could see the six-inch edge of a huge teak door which opened away from them. But there was not enough light from the distant entrance to show the room beyond.

Jenks stood aside to let them enter. "Come on, you blokes," he sneered. "There ain't nothink 'ere to 'urt you!"

They joined him warily, but he swung in beside them.

"Gord, it's dark in 'ere," he muttered. "Wite—"

Fumbling in his pocket for a match, he wheeled back to strike it on the door. Instead of doing that, he grabbed the door and backed out, pulling it shut behind him.

Brice wheeled and sprang, just too late to get his fingers on the edge. The huge door slammed with a cavernous boom. As he clawed for it, a lock-bar chocked into place.

Both men whirled to face the darkness, crouching a little with drawn revolvers. Nothing stirred. There was a very faint scent of perfume in the air.

Through the inch-wide crack at the door hinges came a yell of hyena laughter. "There, you bleedin' blighters!" howled Jenks. "Now find them pearls! Ho! Ho!"

Brice slid his revolver muzzle into the crack and fired. They heard a startled curse, but there was no pain in it. Heavy footsteps retreated, died into silence.

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IV

BRICE tilted his rifle upward and fired. The report half deafened them. "Maybe that'll warn Tiny," he said. The heavy bullet had smashed a tile in the roof near a side wall, admitting a shaft of sunshine. Aiming this time, he fired again. The pool of light on the floor broadened, revealing a squat stone altar. In the shadows beyond, a glimmer of white began to assume outlines. Sam advanced on it warily, peered, and drew a sudden, whistling breath.

"Oh, God!" he muttered.

Brice pulled out a clasp-knife, jumped past him and halted, a sick lump in his throat.

Against the wall behind the altar hung the slender bodies of Su Su and Ying Ying. Stripped to the waist and suspended by their thumbs, the sing-song girls had been mercilessly beaten, then either strangled or left to die.

Brice sawed with his knife and cut them down. They fell against him stiffly, their little ivory bodies cold and rigid. One glance at their faces turned him hot with pity.

He stretched them side by side on the floor. Sam tore off his coat and spread it over their young faces, his lips working. "The poor li'l kids," he choked.

"The pearls!" muttered Brice. "*They're* the two big pearls! It's Chew Ti-hung who's back of all this!"

"By Jehosaphat, he *hired* Jenks!" exploded Sam. "Figured we'd never suspect a white man!"

Brice nodded grimly. "Yeah, he hired Jenks to get us here—find the girls—but then what? He wants us, too. Jenks'll outwit Tiny down there—"

The pound of running feet outside interrupted him. He moved swiftly to the door and listened at the crack. In a moment he heard the hoarse, panting voice of Jenks. "You 'eard 'em firing, matey! The door slammed on 'em! They're be'ind it, fightin' fer life! We gotta break it dahn—"

The voice was in the temple now. Brice set his lips to the crack and yelled: "Tiny! Watch *Jenks!* Look out!"

Breaking off to listen tensely, he heard a muffled thud, a gasp and the clatter of a dropped rifle. "Tiny!" he called. "*Tiny!*"

It was Jenks who answered, his voice nearer, but indistinct as he kept away from the crack. "'E's 'ere close, is your thick-'eaded pal, matey!" chuckled Jenks. "But damn' if 'e ain't dropped orf to sleep, like! 'E ain't dead yet. Not yet, 'e ain't! Did you find them bleedin' pearls, mates?"

This was followed by yells of receding laughter. Again the running footsteps faded and died into silence.

"Jenks tricked him up here to help us, and knocked him cold," Brice groaned. "And I told him to stay aboard. We've gotta get out of here, and quick, too!"

"How?" Sam had faced away from the dead girls.

Brice opened the ration box and stuffed his side-pockets with rifle shells. He slung his rifle over his back and pointed up at the hole in the roof. "There! Put your hands against the wall and I'll shin up."

IN a moment he was standing on Sam's shoulders, his fingertips scratching at the roof beams. He set one foot on Sam's head, raised himself carefully and grabbed the beams. His legs swung through the hole and he sat up on the tiles.

The front of the roof hid the roadstead below. A familiar, coughing bark made him roll over swiftly, his arms spread across the hole. Something whipped overhead and exploded far behind the temple.

"Sam!" he called down. "Lie flat behind the altar! Jenks is shelling us with our own gun—the gun that killed Chew Mensang! That's Chew Ti-hung's scheme! Lock us in here and shell us to death, nice and slow. Clever people, these Chinese. But, hell, Jenks isn't such a hot shot—"

Brice flattened as the quick-firer barked again. The shell landed on the far side of the roof near the front, and sent bits of shattered title whizzing in all directions.

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"He's not so dusty with that gun!" Brice called down. "Lie flat till I let you out—" He began to scramble up the roof, slanting toward the front. The tiles were burning hot from the sun. The climb grew more difficult as the pitch of the roof grew steeper, but he managed to grab the sizzling hot ridge tiles and haul himself over.

A third shell had struck the stone front of the temple, bits of it wailing briefly into the sky. He was clawing toward the hole near the front of the roof when another shell landed farther back, a shred of it almost parting his hair. He scrambled to the front parapet, looked down and reached back for his rifle with an eager curse.

In the roadstead, a power boat manned by two Chinese lay alongside the *Mary Jane*. Two others, pigtailed and blueclad, stood on the tug itself, for'd of the pilot-house.

Near the quick-firer, Jenks was in conference with a dignified and more richly-clad Chinese. Brice guessed the whole plot now. Chew Ti-hung had brought the two girls to the island in the power boat and killed them. Today he had concealed the power boat behind that other island ten miles away, and sent a man to the crest with a telescope. As the man saw three figures climb the path and only one descend, he had shouted the news down to Chew Ti-hung. That wily Chinese had started at once for this island in his power-boat, to watch his enemies shelled to death. And there he was.

The conference ended down there. Jenks walked to a box of shells on deck, the one Brice had hidden. He must have left the helm and spied on them, when they stowed it in the cabin. Now he was loading the gun and sighting it, while Chew Ti-hung stared upward, his hands in his sleeves. The other two Chinese had pattered behind Jenks, to watch also.

Instead of firing and tipping his hand, Brice scrambled back to the hole in the roof. He found a sound beam, lowered himself into the front part of the temple and let go, landing on his feet with a jar. Tiny lay sprawled on his face, halfway to the door. As Brice jumped for him, a shell struck the ridge overhead. It showered them with bits of tile, but the ridge beam took the shattered metal.

Tiny groaned and stirred. Brice leaped over him, unbarred the door and pushed it wide. "Come on, Sam," he called with a snap in his cool voice. "We'll get Tiny out of this. Don't want 'em to know yet that we're loose."

By this time Sam had darted through and joined him. As they bent over Tiny, he moved again, drawing up his leg.

"Get him awake," said Bruce. "I want to see if they can see us. Back in a minute—"

As he reached the entrance, another shell pierced the roof and exploded in the altar room with a vicious bang. A fragment of it whizzed through the open door, but missed them all. Sam raced to shut the door.

FROM the entrance, Brice was surprised to find that he could just see the *Mary Jane* over the shoulder of land in front of the temple. The situation down there was the same.

Brice hesitated, staring over his rifle sights. He did not want to tip his hand, but he did not want them all killed by their own shells. However, Jenks was in no hurry.

Meanwhile, Tiny had begun to recover his wits. Sam was trying to get him on his feet—no mean task.

"Jenks?" muttered Tiny, batting his eyes. He swung a huge, clumsy fist, which Sam managed to duck just in time.

'Quit that, or I'll slap you down!" Sam barked irritably. "Try and get on your feet, y'big horse."

Tiny staggered upright, swaying, one hand around at the back of his head. "Wow!" he sighed. "Where's Dan?"

"Right there, sleepy head!" Sam bent and caught up Tiny's rifle. Jenks had made a slip in leaving it.

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"Duck!" shouted Brice. Sam bowled Tiny over and lay on top of him as a shell ripped off the northern eaves. Tiny heaved loose and got up again, looking confused.

"Where's that Limey, Jenks?" he growled.

"Down there, firin' your Barking-Dog at us!" Sam told him viciously. "Whyn't you *stay* aboard, Goldilocks? Did the nasty man offer you some candy?" Sam was trying to forget those still bodies in the altar room.

This woke Tiny up with a bang. "*My* gun!" he howled. "Here, gimme that rifle!"

Brice had been thinking as he watched the tug. Chew Ti-hung had gone to a lot of trouble to be suitably revenged. But if things got too hot would he run, or stick it out? Brice could see the powerboat's wheel and the bulge of its gas tank. He could wreck the first and plug the second—

Tiny's howl of rage made him turn. "Skip it!" he ordered. "And come here, both of you—Duck!

On the word, a shell blew another hole in the roof over their heads and filled the place with whizzing fragments. Luckily, none of them was really hurt, though Sam got a rap on the foot that made him hop and swear for a second.

"Now! While he's reloading!" said Brice quickly. "Crawl out on your hands and knees. They can't see you like that. Make for that flat cliff to the north, Sam. Cover the tug, but don't shoot. Wait for my signal. I'm going to the south cliff. Want to surprise 'em. Get started! And make it snappy!"

Tiny and Sam crawled out in a hurry and went north. As the top of the island widened and flattened, they ran at a stoop and then erect, veering toward the cliff.

Meanwhile Brice had crawled hurriedly south, using the same tactics, as the cliff edge cut him off from sight of the tug. Another shell had banged hollowly inside the temple. When he could stand erect, Brice looked north. Sam had the rifle and was crawling warily toward the edge of the cliff that overlooked the cove. Tiny was behind him, on three legs, his spare paw rubbing the back of his head.

Within fifty yards, Brice found a place such as he wanted. He crept to the edge of the cliff and slowly looked down, only the top of his head showing. Jenks was reloading the gun, while Chew Ti-hung stared up at the temple. The two members of the powerboat crew stood behind them.

Brice slid his rifle out very slowly. It was within their vision, but none of the men below saw the movement. Hard lips thinned. Brice lined the steady sights on Jenks and pulled the trigger gently.

AT THE instant the hammer fell, Jenks crouched to aim the one-pounder. Brice missed Jenks and killed a blue-clad Chinese, blasting him backward into the water. The rest fled behind the deckhouse, Jenks close at their heels. Brice fanned his coat-tail with lead, but missed his body again. The two Chinese on the powerboat scrambled aboard the tug and dropped behind the shelter of the armored deckhouse.

Brice eased back from the cliff. The ex-marines had long since arranged a code of signals. A vertical wave meant *Yes* or *Go ahead*. A horizontal wave meant *No* or *Wait*. Brice waved his arm from side to side negatively, and crawled to the cliff edge in a different place.

As he looked down, the near cabin door of the *Mary Jane* opened slightly. Nothing appeared in the narrow crack, but a heavy bullet struck the cliff face just under Brice and whined into the sky, an inch from his face.

Brice slammed the cabin door shut again with a bullet from his own rifle. It appeared that Jenks had found Sam's rifle. He had been too wily to show the barrel in the opening. Also, he could shoot.

The door did not open again. Quiet descended on the roadstead below, until Brice could hear the wash of gravel and the creak as the two boats rubbed together lazily.

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V

FOR half an hour the tug and the whole cove seemed to be asleep in the sun. Up on the cliff, his eyes slitted against the water dazzle, Brice waited and watched for Jenks next move.

Meanwhile, farther north, Sam kept the tug covered and told Tiny what had happened to Su Su and Ying Ying. He spoke over his shoulder. After one strangled sound Tiny listened in silence. Sam did not look at him and had no reason to guess how very hard he was taking the news. Nor did Sam realize, a few minutes later, that he was alone. Like many big men, Tiny could move very quietly when he chose.

On the opposite cliff, Brice was growing restless.

"Still in conference," he thought, licking his dry lips, "and a darn' long conference—"

His roving gaze steadied suddenly, black eyes squinting against the light. There was a shimmer of heat above the *Mary Jane*. An instant later, pale brown smoke began to roll lazily from the tug's stack. Jenks was getting up steam.

Brice stared. They could not move the tug without hoisting her anchors. His rifle covered the anchor winches, both fore and aft. He was puzzled, which made him uneasy.

A movement at the *Mary Jane's* stem caught his eye. The fore anchor chain was being drawn slowly and mysteriously aft, on the far side of the lifting bows. He looked aft. The stern anchor chain was hidden from him below deck level. But the angle of it had changed in the heavy shock.

Brice wormed back from the cliff with a curse that was half admiration. Jenks had slipped overboard and made a line fast to the anchor chains, under water. Now, from the shelter of the pilot-house, they were simply hauling in and tripping both anchors. Once these were free and hanging in the water, Jenks meant to steam out of rifle range. There, he could either shell them at long range or leave them on the island to starve.

The only weak link in his scheme was the helm. The pilot-house was armored only breast-high. The windows were vulnerable, not only the fixed windows but those in the doors.

In a few seconds Brice had crawled hurriedly out to the cliff edge at a point nearer the temple. This gave him a side-to-side view of the pilot-house. He was just in time to see one of the Chinese dart in the far side door. Glancing up at the cliff where Brice had been, the Chinese stood where a corner of the pilot-house hid him from that point. He made a grab for the cord and blew the whistle loud and long. Then he reached for the helm.

At the whistle, Brice saw the water surge and eddy at the tug's stern. Lips thinned with purpose, he aimed carefully and fired. It was a perfect shot, for it spattered the far side of the pilot-house with brains and blood. As he fell, the Chinaman's clutching dead hand yanked the wheel over to port instead of to starboard. Gathering speed, the *Mary Jane* veered in a slow curve toward the beach.

Jenks must have felt or seen that the tug was headed wrong, for the powerful screw stopped and then went into reverse. But he was too late to do more than check her speed. The *Mary Jane* grounded solidly bows on, and stuck there.

Creeping farther out as the tug came inshore, Brice saw something else that made him curse savagely. It was Tiny, descending the cliff toward his ship and his gun. Armed only with a revolver, he was taking advantage of what cover there was, which was mighty little. He was already halfway down.

Brice yelled to Sam and pointed down at Tiny. Sam had not fired at all. Swearing under his breath, Brice watched the tug for a sign of Jenks.

MEANWHILE, things were stirring down there. Fast to the *Mary Jane* near her stern, the power boat had been dragged alongside, but had not grounded. When the tug stopped with a jar, the two

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remaining Chinese sailors went into a panic. They leaped from cover and tumbled, howling, aboard their own craft. One of them flew at the engine. The other lay flat and as small as possible under the cockpit combing.

Naked to the waist, Jenks shot out of the engineroom door, rifle in hand, zigzagged three swift paces and vanished into the cabin as Brice fired. The shot was another miss, and Brice cursed himself savagely.

Jenks' furious bellow from the cabin door rose distinctly to Brice on the cliff: "Wait one minute, Chew Ti-'ung, then get aboard an' cast orf, w'ile I cover you!"

As he risked a quick glance down in search of Tiny, Brice figured ironically that Jenks had not been paid yet. Tiny had almost reached the foot of the cliff.

Repeated harsh orders in Chinese finally lifted the second sailor from the floor of the cockpit to the helm. The orders came from abaft the armored deckhouse, where the wily Chew Ti-hung had taken cover. At almost the same moment, the power-boat engine roared into life, then softened to a muffled throbbing. More Chinese threats set the helmsman to casting off, his fingers all thumbs, his eyes on the cliff above.

Originally there had been two deadlights in the bow wall of the cabin under the pilot-house. Brice had replaced these with portholes for the sake of the air on hot nights.

Now, watching the *Mary Jane* narrowly, he saw one of these portholes open swiftly inward. He fired at once, clipping the brass edge. At the same moment, the other porthole swung inward. Obviously Jenks wanted to keep him guessing.

Sam must have looked down and seen Tiny—realized the vital need to keep Jenks' attention on the cliffs. Not quite the rifle shot that Brice was, his bullet clanged on the armorplate close to the second porthole.

One of the Chinese had climbed forward and cast off the power boat, clinging to the tug with his hands.

Brice fired through the first cabin-port. With the kick of his rifle, he saw Chew Ti-hung gallop clumsily from shelter and scramble aboard the power boat. Brice tried to drop him, but the snap-shot was just a click of the hammer.

He began to reload swiftly, staring down. He heard the flat bark of Sam's rifle and a shriek of lead glancing from the rim of the porthole. Galvanized by the sound, Chew Ti-hung ballooned into the cockpit of his own boat and flung himself flat on his back, partly under the combing.

The Chinese in the bows pushed off and began to climb aft in response to a harsh squeal from his master.

From deep in the cabin a lead slug came hunting for Brice. It was so close that he heard the *Whitt!* of it in one ear. In Jenks he had found his match as a rifle shot.

Reloaded now, he fired in return, scoring another blind bull's-eye through the open port. Then he craned forward. Tiny was halfway down the sweep of the beach, zig-zagging in great leaps toward the bows of the *Mary Jane*.

On the power boat, the Chinese engineer dropped into the cockpit. The engine roared, then slowed as he pushed home the gear-lever. Chew Ti-hung made a grab and pulled his engineer down on top of him, as a shield. The man squirmed in panic for an instant. Then he lay still.

SAM'S rifle cracked again, scoring a bull's-eye. There was no answering shot from the cabin. The power boat had veered away from the tug in a tight sweep for the open sea. Above the noise it made, Brice heard the bellow of rage from the cabin. The diminishing stutter had warned Jenks that Chew Ti-hung was leaving him behind.

At the same instant, Tiny plunged into the surf and gained shelter under the *Mary's Jane's* bows. Not content with that, he waded aft along the tug's side until the water rose to his armpits. But he kept his revolver clear of it.

The power boat had almost completed

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its turn, when Jenks thrust Sam's rifle out the cabin door to fire after it. In his blind rage, Tiny fired his revolver at the barrel. He missed, but the smack of his bullet in the door casing distracted Jenks and made him miss the power boat.

Brice had no more intention of letting Chew Ti-hung escape than Jenks had. Tiny had ducked below the tug's rail. He was working farther aft with one hand. Jenks dared not come out after him, under the fire of two rifles.

Aiming coolly just ahead of the speeding power boat, Brice fired as it crept up into his sights. His careful shot plugged the gas tank with a clang that echoed between the low cliffs. Yells drifted back, but the power boat sped on.

A shout made Brice turn his head. Sam was plunging down the path in zig-zag bounds ,his rifle aloft. A bullet from one of the cabin ports missed him narrowly and scattered chips of whizzing rock behind him.

Brice started firing alternately at the portholes, as fast as good shooting permitted. Most of his bullets entered the cabin, for he had the range now. Though he kept his hard, slitted eyes on the ports, he saw Tiny heave himself aboard the tug near the stern and make for the deckhouse. And he was conscious of Sam bounding in crooked leaps down the path and out on the beach.

Jenks must have retreated to the after part of the cabin and stood on something to be out of range of the down-slanting bullets. On the heels of one of his own shots, Brice heard the muffled crack of a rifle. Cursing, he saw Sam spin half around and plunge head first on his side down the beach.

Tiny's bulk showed for an instant on top of the deck-house. Then the pilothouse hid him as he stooped over the cabin skylights. Brice held his fire.

Up to the cliff where he lay rose Tiny's stentorian bellow of hate: "Drop that rifle and stand where you are! I've got you covered!"

Cold with dread, Brice stared down at the motionless figure sprawled on the beach. In the sudden silence he heard the clatter of Jenks' rifle on the cabin floor. Then, and not until then, the crafty Sam jumped to his feet, picked up his rifle and made for the tug, his free hand clutching his arm.

Brice grinned his relief and made for the path. He was halfway down when the meaning of the utter silence came home to him. The distant throb of the power boat had ceased.

He checked and stared seaward. Perhaps two miles from land, the little craft rolled broadside on, winking in the sun. It was far out of accurate range, but helpless—

Brice went swiftly down the path to the beach. Sam had boarded the *Mary Jane*. He stood in the cabin entrance.

"Come out!" he snapped, backing clear of the door.

Jenks slouched on deck, hands shoulder high, scarred lip raised in a sneer more vicious than usual. Tiny dropped off the deckhouse, his little eyes wicked with purpose.

"Get ashore, you!" he muttered in a low growl. "We ain't forgettin' them little Chink dames up there."

Brice paused at the water's edge and said nothing. For once, he felt no mercy. By treachery and attempted murder, Jenks had broken the code that runs where no law exists.

"Yeah," nodded Sam. "End of the line here, Jenks."

"You keep out of this, Sam. He's my meat." Tiny's voice held a primitive hate that Brice had never heard before.

Jenks was looking from one to the other, his heavy face the color of old driftwood. "I didn't 'ave nothink to do wif killin' your little sing-song gels. But I got you blokes 'ere to pop you orf fer murder, and that Chinaman turned yellow. Aw, go a'ead an' shoot. I 'aven't got no gun." His voice was surly with defeat, but there was no whine in it.

"Except the gun under your arm, Limey," said Brice.

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"Take it out and drop it," said Tiny, "if you want a chance to live, Jenks."

THE big mate reached for his shoulder-holster, and hesitated. He might kill one of these men, but it meant certain death from the others. He drew the gun and dropped it.

Three minutes later he stood on the beach facing Tiny. Sam and Brice stood watching nearby, their revolvers holstered, their rifles on the tug. Tiny shed his holstered gun and then his coat. Jenks took off his coat.

"To the finish, and no rules," said Tiny, his hot little eyes watchful. "With you, anything goes. If you win, you go free. If I win, I'm gonna kill you. Get it?"

"I get it," snarled Jenks to hide his savage joy. "*You* come an' get it, Yank!" On the word, he charged.

Tiny met the charge, half blocked a swinging right and buried his huge fist in Jenks' stomach. Jenks grunted and bent over for an instant, arms guarding his head. Tiny rushed him. Jenks straightened, grinned and met the charge with a straight left and a swinging right that set Tiny back on his heels. Far more quickly than Jenks expected, Tiny got his balance, sprang in, feinted with his left and again buried his fist in Jenks' stomach. This time the big mate's grunt of distress was genuine, but he came back with an uppercut that missed and a left that cut Tiny above the eye.

For half a minute they stood and slugged with no attempt at blocking. But Tiny was quick for a big man, quicker than Jenks and as heavy. He smashed the mate's nose and shut one of his eyes, but concentrated mostly on the heaving stomach, his own face torn, snarling and streaked with blood.

Jenks fell back and kicked savagely. Tiny twisted just in time and caught the heavy boot on his thigh. He tore into a clinch, avoiding a lifted knee that was meant for his groin. Off balance, Jenks clawed for his eyes. By the weight of his rush, Tiny pulled a swift cross-buttock. Jenks lit on his back with a jar. Tiny stood over him, waiting.

Instead of trying to get up, Jenks slewed round on his back and launched another vicious kick. Panting but watchful and just quick enough to avoid it, Tiny went berserk. As the heavy boot slid off his thigh, he sprang into the air and came down on Jenks' chest with both knees, his right fist back.

"Hold it!" said Brice sharply.

Deaf with rage and almost blind, Tiny stared down at the mate. He had not heard the splintering crack as he landed. Jenks was limp, his head on one side, blood welling from his mouth. A shudder ran through his big body. Then he lay still. The flow of blood slackened and ceased.

Tiny stood up, panting and wiping his hands on his breeches. Brice stooped over Jenks and pressed an ear to his heart. Then he stood up slowly.

"You smashed his ribs, Tiny," he said. "One of 'em went through his heart. And that's that."

"I didn't mean to do that—" muttered Tiny.

Sam laughed grimly. "He's gone and good riddance."

Brice was staring out to sea. The power boat was no more than a white speck in the distance. Somehow Chew Ti-hung and his men had stepped a mast and hoisted a sail.

"Come on," he said grimly. "We've got to float the *Mary Jane* and finish this. Chew Ti-hung killed those girls."

After a quick stare seaward, Tiny and Sam left Jenks where he lay and splashed aboard the tug. There Brice took charge again. Tiny had saved them from a grim job.

"Tide's rising," said Brice. "We'll go below and fix you two up. Then we'll get her afloat—"

Jenks had hit Sam in the arm. The whirling slug had plowed through muscle and missed the bone. Brice cauterized and dressed the wound, while Tiny washed the blood off his face and cleaned up generally after his battle.

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Brice sent him to get steam up again. Sailor-fashion, Jenks had shut off the oil jets. Brice and Sam opened the forehatch. The *Mary Jane* had sprung a leak, but it was not enough to matter. When Tiny reported a full head of steam, they tried backing. The tug would not budge.

They fell to work like demons, shifting the cases of beef to the stern. When that failed, they went ashore and staggered back with large rocks to get her down by the stern and lift her bows. In the middle of this an extra big wave slid under the tug and they felt a very slight jar.

"That's done it," panted Brice. "Full speed astern, Tiny!" He made for the pilot house, wiping his face with his sleeve. "Stay aft, Sam," he called back.

WHIRLING deep at full speed, the powerful screw sent a boiling wash forward up the beach. It helped lift the bows. The *Mary Jane* backed free in short, scraping bumps. In three minutes she was in deep water, broadside to the beach as she answered her helm. The engineroom bell clanged repeatedly. She completed her turn and headed out to sea at full speed.

Sam dumped the rocks overboard and went below for a sweater to replace the coat he had left over the dead girls.

When he came on deck, looking white, Brice called him into the pilot-house. "Take over, Sam. They rigged a sail on that power boat. She's way out of sight, but this is about her course—west by south. Watch for her."

Sam took the helm. Brice went to the engine room, asked Tiny to rustle some chow, then swung into the forehold. There was little more bilge than usual. He climbed on deck and began lugging the cases of beef tins from the stern to the bows, piling them in a double breastwork in front of the quick-firer. They would hide the gun, and also protect Tiny when or if he fired it. These were pirate waters.

When he had eaten, he returned to the bows. Only three shells remained in the case Jenks had used. So Brice hauled up and broke open a full case of shells.

He had the breastworks lashed and shipshape when Sam called from the helm: "Sail ho! Off the starb'd bow!"

Brice joined Sam and found his binoculars. It was a big junk, hull down on the horizon, due west of them. He studied the brown lugsails. The junk was sailing south, across their bows. "South a point," he said quickly. "Make the course west south west—"

For half an hour he studied the nearing junk. At last he moved the glasses south a little and caught a wink of white. "Got 'em!" he exclaimed, putting away the glasses.

"Got what?" muttered Sam irately. "The hives?" His arm had stiffened and was aching.

"The power boat. Junk's after it—close. Wait'll I stir up Tiny for a little more speed—Sourpuss!"

"Nuts to you," Sam called after him, grinning.

The *Mary Jane* trembled and throbbed with all the speed she had. Brice and Sam watched the other two craft of the converging triangle. The tug was faster, but the junk was much nearer her prey. Still, they were less than a mile away when the junk crept alongside the power boat.

Brice ran to the engineroom and called Tiny up to do his stuff with the quick-firer. He took the helm and sent the glowering Sam below to run the engine. While Tiny loaded and trained the quick-firer, he got his binoculars on the sea drama ahead. Pirate junk, or rescue ship for Chew Ti-hung?

AS the scene leaped closer, he knew. Figures had swarmed down on the power boat. He caught the flash of steel. A blue-clad sailor went limply overboard, then the other.

Now there was a confused struggle in the cockpit. Men were dragging Chew Ti-hung toward the side of the junk. They meant obviously to hold him for ransom. He would go free in time—escape their vengeance—

Brice stuck his head out the door.

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"Let 'em have it, Tiny!" he shouted. "Long range!"

The first shell was short, but skipped on the smooth sea, hit the flimsy power boat and blew in its side. It sank at once, leaving Chew Ti-hung and three pirates clinging to the rail of the junk. As Brice drove nearer he could see and hear faintly the wild commotion on her decks.

The next shell caught her amidships and high, sweeping her rail clean of the dangling men.

"There goes Chew Ti-hung like his brother," Brice thought. "Now sink her, Tiny!" he shouted.

Shell after shell tore into the junk at her water-line. As they surged nearer, rifle bullets peppered the tug. Then the pirates quit firing, to lower their boats.

The junk heeled crazily, sinking by the bows. She went down with a gurgle of sucking laughter.

"That's for the *Shanghai Belle*," muttered Brice. He put the wheel down as the tug surged through the wreckage. She made a complete turn, heading back on her course.

Tiny lumbered into the pilot-house. "Goin' back for Su Su and Ying Ying, huh?" he growled. "We got a spade in the after hold. We gotta do it."

Brice shook his head. "We'll bury 'em at sea. As skipper, I'll make a stab at the burial service. They were pals. We'll sew 'em up in the spare tarp'lin and slide 'em down together, Tiny. It's the best we can do for 'em now."

Tiny looked down. "I guess it is," he growled huskily. "Yeah, I guess it is, all right."

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MEN of DARING

By Stook & Allen

Colored War Ace

BULLARD!— THE ONLY NEGRO FLYER IN THE WORLD WAR! MANY AMERICAN FLYERS REMEMBER HIM AS A BRAVE AND LOYAL COMRADE AND A VERY FINE COMBAT PILOT. BORN IN GEORGIA, BULLARD WAS PRIZE-FIGHTING IN PARIS WHEN THE WAR STARTED. (DEFEATED SOME OF THE BEST IN THE GAME).

HE ENLISTED IN THE FOREIGN LEGION AND ALMOST INSTANTLY SO DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF IN MAD CHARGES OVER THE LINES THAT HE WAS ALLOWED TO TRANSFER TO THE FRENCH AIR SERVICE.

EUGENE **Bullard**

A FLASHY DRESSER, HE WORE SHINY PATENT-LEATHER BOOTS AND RED BREECHES.

BULLARD WAS A NATURAL FIGHTER. HE HAD TO HIS CREDIT **75** FLYING HOURS OVER ENEMY TERRITORY!— AND WON PLENTY OF AIR BATTLES— WON THE CROIX DE GUERRE AND MANY OTHER MEDALS.

IN 1917 HE HAD AN ALTERCATION WITH A FRENCH COLONEL AND WAS DEMOTED TO A MOTORCYCLE DISPATCH RIDER— AND AGAIN HE WAS DECORATED BEFORE THE WAR ENDED. AFTER THE WAR BULLARD OPENED A GYMNASIUM IN PARIS. TODAY, IT IS A THRIVING BUSINESS.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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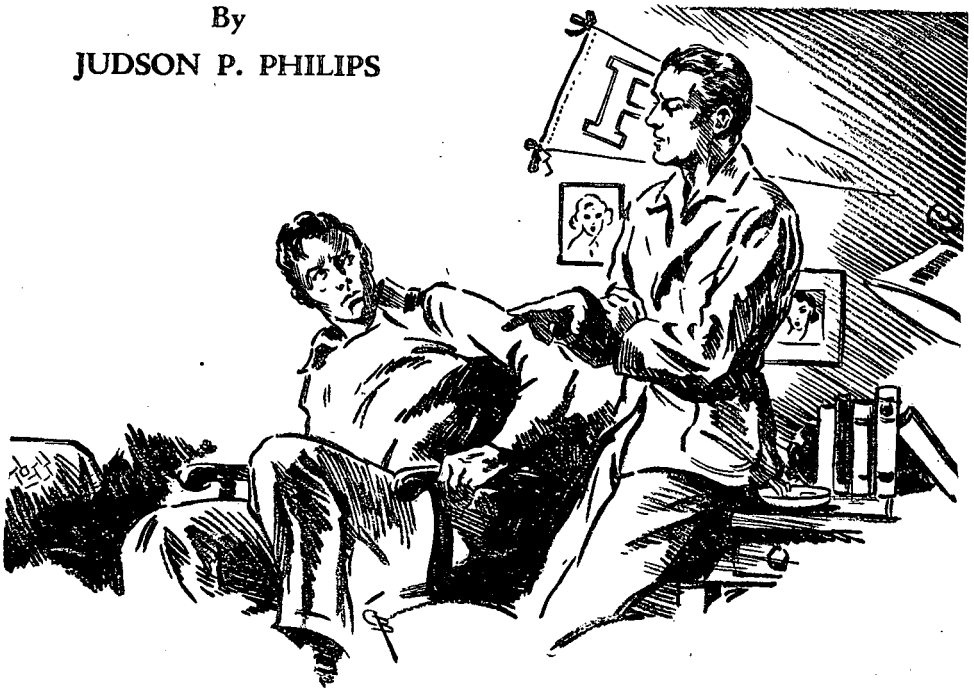
Tiger on Parade

By
JUDSON P. PHILIPS



THE Trevors are industrial aristocrats. They own the mill in the village of Winsett, Connecticut. Young Barry Trevor—as his father and brother have been—is a student at Princeton. Things have always come easily to Barry. He is handsome, a natural athlete and football player. He has not even had to fight for the girl he is engaged to, Hope Loring.

At the other end of the social scale from Barry Trevor is Jack Dominick. Jack's father is an old employé of the Trevor mills, and Jack, too, has worked in the mills since he left high school. He is an ambitious, intelligent boy, but he might never have dreamed the fantastic dream of going to Princeton if, one day, he had not accidentally bumped into Hope Loring on the street. While he was apologizing and retrieving her packages, he fell in love with her. From then on he has saved his money and at twenty-five he enters Princeton.

DOMINICK stars at Freshman football practice, but when Barry Trevor tells Coach Tyson that Dominick has played professional baseball in Winsett, Dominick is told that he will be ineligible for all athletics at Princeton. Stunned by the blow, Dominick gets drunk. At the Peacock Inn he meets Hope Loring. She takes him for a drive in the country and convinces him that he must continue at Princeton and not let his misfortune get the best of him. Next day she calls and asks him to take her to the Penn-Princeton game. She introduces him to the coach of the "Omelettes"—a football squad composed of ineligibles who scrimmage the Varsity. The coach invites Dominick to join his squad.

In the Penn game Barry Trevor first breaks away to a long run for a touchdown and then in the last quarter he loses the game by missing a signal, kicking against Coach Tyson's orders and allowing French, the Penn Flash, to score. The game ends and Jack Dominick sits beside Hope, knowing that Barry has lost the game and wishing terribly that he had been out there playing, wishing that Hope Loring were his girl... Hope knows that a crisis impends for Barry now—will he be strong enough to face it?...

This serial began in the Argosy for October 23

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CHAPTER IX

A CRISIS FOR BARRY

BARRY TREVOR left the stadium for the dressing room in a daze. He had taken a scathing dressing-down from Tyson. Until that moment he hadn't realized what had really taken place. When he was sent into the game he knew it was to kick Princeton out of danger. No other play had occurred to him. When Halligan called for the kick formation in the huddle he thought he knew what was coming. The rest of the signals had only been a fog to him—he had been concentrating on the task that lay ahead of him; to get that kick off before Penn's charging ends were on him. He had meant to angle his kick across the field, but King and Lavender had been in so fast that he had unconsciously fallen back on his old style of punting, and given it everything he had. Even in the disaster that followed he hadn't dreamed that he'd missed a signal.

The Princeton dressing room was a strange, funereal place. As the door closed on the last player, Barry, sitting in a sort of fog in front of his locker was suddenly confronted by Big Bob Amos who had played sixty minutes of grueling football at tackle for the Tiger. Tears were coursing unashamedly down Amos' cheeks.

"You swell-headed lug!" he said bitterly. "You lost a game for us that we had won! You've acted like a prima donna around here for weeks, and now you've done it when it counts! You lost that game."

Barry got slowly to his feet, his eyes blazing. His nerves had been rubbed to the raw and he couldn't take any more. "Oh, I lost it, eh?" he snarled. "I don't suppose that bad pass from center had anything to do with it? I don't suppose—"

"I'll tell you who lost that game," a rasping voice cut in. Both boys turned to face Lew Tyson, who stood behind them, his pale blue eyes cold with fury. "*I* lost it!" he rapped. "I lost it when I put you in there, Trevor. I should have known how your mind was working. I should have known you were already visualizing your name in headlines. I should have known you couldn't imagine any reason for being sent into the game except for the purpose of making you a bigger hero. You've got a star complex, Trevor. Your father and brother were stars and they earned it, but you seem to think it comes to you by divine right!"

Tyson knew he was being unreasonable, but the bitter disappointment of that last minute defeat had destroyed his control.

Barry flew into little bits at that. "I've taken all I'm going to take from you, Mr. Tyson! You've been riding me since the first day of practice. You've had it in for me—I don't know why. Well, I'm through—through with Princeton football as long as you run it. But that may not be long! My father's chairman of the graduate committee. When he learns how you discriminate and play favorites perhaps the committee will have something to say to you that'll change your tune!"

Tyson turned away, his face dead white. "Somebody get that kid out of here before I lose my head and my job and paste him one!"

IT HAD been a day that Jack Dominick would never forget. First there had been Hope; and then the realization that suddenly Princeton meant something to him. The defeat had affected him as a personal misfortune. Not only that, the day had brought him hope. Moxie Farrell's invitation to play on the Omelettes had opened a new vista to him. The way to making friends and building his own college life had opened to him again.

He had taken Hope back to the Peacock Inn after the game. Barry was to meet her there for supper.

"I'll be down for one of the games soon," she told him. "Perhaps next week. I'll see you?"

"It would make me very happy," he said, simply.

That was that. He had gone back to his room and refused Stoddard's invitation to supper. He wanted to be alone.

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It was about ten o'clock, and he was sitting by his window looking out over the campus, his pipe glowing red in the darkness, when Mother McGrady knocked at his door. A telephone call!

It was Hope! The tone of her voice made him instantly anxious.

"If you haven't gone to bed I wonder if I could see you for a few minutes?" she asked.

"Of course! Is something wrong?"

"I'll tell you when I see you. I'll wait for you at the Inn."

It took Dominick less than ten minutes to dress and get there. He was worried, but he was elated and excited, too. Hope Loring was in trouble and she had called on *him!*

She was sitting in the lounge in one corner of a leather-covered couch. He dropped down beside her.

"I guess I was an idiot to send for you," she said, with a twisted little smile. "But I'm terribly worried."

"What's happened?" he asked, quickly. "You know how happy I'll be to help you if I can."

"It's about Barry!" she said.

Barry! He felt his heart sink.

"He's in an awful mess, Jack. Moxie tried to explain to me and I *think* I understand. Something about missing a signal and losing the game."

"I know," said Dominick, grimly.

"He had a dreadful row in the locker room after the game with Mr. Tyson. He's quit football. He's going to his father to try to get the Graduate Committee to do something about Mr. Tyson."

"I don't imagine Tyson is very worried!" said Dominick, grimly.

"It isn't *that!*" She looked up at him as if she were surprised he hadn't understood. "It's that Barry's making such a fool of himself! He mustn't, Jack! This is the first time he has ever had anything but smooth sailing. He's got to fight it out for himself, not go crying about it to his father. Somebody's got to make him see that! Somebody's got to make him realize that he must go out for practice again on Monday and win his way back onto the team. He must have been making an awful ass of himself, Jack, or they wouldn't have been so tough with him about a mistake."

"Which cost them a hard earned victory!" Dominick pointed out. He smiled, a crooked little smile. "The trouble is, I guess, that the mistake was in character! He was thinking about himself—not the team."

"He's got to learn!" she said earnestly. "Somebody's got to make him see the right course to take."

"Meaning *me?*" asked Dominick, his eyebrows raised.

"That's why I wanted to see you," she said quickly. "I thought if you could . . ."

"What about Farrell? He's an old friend of the family."

"Moxie's disgusted with him," the girl said. "Says he's a spoiled brat and ought to be spanked!"

Dominick lit a cigarette and studied the end of it thoughtfully. "I don't think I can do much," he said. "He doesn't like me. He wouldn't listen to anything I could tell him."

The girl looked very distressed. "This kind of thing will leave a mark on him the rest of his life, if he doesn't pull out of it the right way," she said.

Dominick drew a deep breath. "You straightened me out just about twenty-four hours ago," he said. "I owe you something and I'll do what I can. But I'm not much of a diplomat, Hope. When a guy goes haywire in the world I've lived in we put him through the meat chopper—give him the works."

"It would do him good!" she said, eagerly.

"Well, we can only give it a try!" he said.

Suddenly her hand closed over his arm. "Barry!" she said, in a whisper.

DOMINICK turned and saw Barry Trevor coming across the lounge toward them. His handsome face was sullen and he gave Dominick a nasty look.

"Okay, Freshman, scram!" he said.

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Dominick started to rise but Hope's fingers tightened on his arm.

"You're driving me back to Winsett tonight, Hope," said Barry. "I'm going to see father and have him settle this Tyson business once and for all."

"Barry, you're out of your head!" Hope protested. "You don't seriously think your father would or could do anything."

"You'll see!" said Barry. "But I don't care to discuss it in front of Dominick. Will you be good enough to leave us alone?" he asked Dominick coldly.

Hope still clutched Dominick's arm. "I'm not going to drive you back, Barry," she said. "You've lost your head. You've got to cool off and think things over."

"Cool off!" Barry's voice rose angrily. "D'you think I'm going to let Tyson take me for a sleigh ride? Do you think I'm going to have the whole college blaming me for a stinking defeat just because no one else wants to shoulder the blame? Well, I'm not!"

"Barry, stop shouting!" Hope pleaded.

"I won't stop shouting!" he said, his voice even louder. "I'm going to let the whole college know just what kind of a mug Tyson is!"

"Perhaps," said Dominick, very quietly, his gray eyes looking steadily at Hope, "it *would* be better if you drove him home."

She opened her mouth to protest and then closed it. "Very well," she said. "The car's outside and my bags are already in it. Are you ready, Barry?"

Barry took Hope's arm almost roughly and led her out of the Inn. Dominick followed behind. As they got out to the driveway beside the car Dominick slipped forward and took Barry's arm.

"Listen, Trevor," he said softly, "Miss Loring doesn't want to drive you home—so she isn't going to. You're going to stay here and soak your head till you cool off. I brought you outside because I didn't want you to make a public scene."

Barry turned, his face livid. "Listen, Dominick, I've got plenty to say to you, too, but I was saving it till Hope wasn't here. Well, I'm not saving it now. I don't want any Polack factory-hand trying to chisel time with my girl. Is that quite clear?"

"Barry!" Hope's voice was outraged. "I asked Mr. Dominick to take me to the game. I asked him to come over here tonight."

"Then all I can say is you ought to know better!" Barry snarled. "Or perhaps you're the type of girl that winds up by running off with the chauffeur—just for the excitement!"

Dominick's fist only traveled a short way, but it was loaded. Barry's head snapped back and then he collapsed face forward on the gravel.

THE color had drained from Dominick's face and he was breathing as if he'd been running fast. He stood staring at Barry's inert figure on the gravel roadway, unconsciously rubbing the knuckles of his right hand. Finally he turned to Hope, who still sat in the car, gripping the steering wheel.

"I'm sorry," Dominick said, quietly. "It—it just sort of happened!"

"He had it coming to him," Hope said, in an unsteady voice.

Dominick knelt down beside Barry. "We better get him out of here before a crowd turns up," he said. He lifted Barry almost effortlessly in his arms and placed him in the seat beside Hope. He stood on the running board himself. "His room's in Blair. Drive us as close to it as you can. I'll get him up to his quarters." He saw a panicky look in Hope's eyes. "Don't worry. He'll come to in a minute. I just happened to catch him on the button!" He smiled faintly in the darkness. It hadn't been a "just happen" punch. Dominick had swung too many punches in his rough-and-tumble career for them to be accidental.

Hope said nothing, but started the car and headed for Blair. Before they reached a stopping place Barry began to groan and stir restlessly in the seat. He shook his head as if trying to clear away a fog.

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"Better stop here," Dominick said. He wanted to get Barry out of the car and away from Hope before he fully regained his senses. When the car stopped he took Barry under the arms and lifted him out. Barry was struggling feebly now.

"You run along," Dominick said to Hope. "I can manage him from here on. It'll only start things all over again if he sees you when he comes to."

Hope nodded. Her lips were tightly compressed. "You won't let me down, Jack? You'll find some way to make him see sense?"

"If it's humanly possible," said Dominick. "Goodnight."

With his arm around a muttering, grumbling Barry, Dominick made his way to the entrance of Blair. Barry's legs were still like rubber under him, and he kept sagging every few steps and would have fallen but for Dominick's strong grip.

Then, just as they reached the entrance of Blair they came face to face with Gus, one of the proctors.

"Hello! What's this?" Gus demanded, his ugly Irish face twisted into a menacing scowl.

"Stinko!" said Dominick, blandly. "Help me get him to his room."

"Creatin' a disturbance, eh?" growled Gus, who had apparently had a number of such cases on his hands that evening. He peered at Barry in the light from the doorway. "Glory be, it's Trevor!" he said. He sighed, wearily. "The footballers is all gone haywire tonight. Well, I guess you can't blame 'em."

WITH Gus on one side and Dominick on the other they carted Barry up the stairs to the second floor where his rooms were located. Barry was beginning to make sense, muttering dire threats of vengeance against Dominick, but his speech was still so thick and befuddled that Gus had no reason to doubt Dominick's diagnosis of the situation.

As they opened the door to Barry's room, a stout, red-haired young man dressed in well-cut tweeds, rose from an arm chair in the corner. He held a highball glass in his hand. Dominick recognized him as Gilbert "Fat" Shanahan, Barry's roommate.

"Shanahan and I can take care of him," Dominick said to Gus. "Thanks for the lift."

"That's okay," said Gus. "But keep him quiet," he warned. "We'll not put up with any shenanigans tonight with visitors all over the campus." And with a glowering look at Barry, whom they had dropped in an arm chair, Gus took his departure, closing the door after him.

Shanahan put down his highball glass on the desk and regarded Dominick thoughtfully. "Pretty decent of you to bring him in, Freshman," he said in a sort of irritating drawl. "I understand there's not exactly a deep affection between you! Where'd he get it?"

"Get what?" Dominick said, sharply.

"The snootful," said Shanahan.

"He's not tight. I socked him," said Dominick casually.

Shanahan's moon-shaped eyebrows went up in a surprised expression. Dominick had never met him before, but he was a familiar figure about the campus. Jerry Stoddard had given Dominick the lowdown on him.

"Lousy with money and a politician at heart," Jerry had said. "You'll notice he doesn't affect the sloppy dress habits most of the boys have. Always immaculate. He works on the theory it doesn't matter why they remember you as long as they remember you."

Shanahan's eyebrows came down to normal. "You better beat a retreat," he drawled. "When Master Barry comes to he'll start trouble all over again."

"I think not," said Dominick. "Besides, I want to talk to him."

Shanahan shrugged. "In that case I think I'll go for a little stroll. Bloodshed is not in my line." He drained his glass and started for the door. Then he stopped and turned to the mantelpiece. He removed a china tobacco jar and took it into the next room. When he returned he said

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almost apologetically, "An old family heirloom which I cherish!" And he went out.

IT WAS right after that Barry Trevor struggled to his feet. He swayed back and forth on his feet, but the haze seemed to be clearing from his eyes. "So you're looking for more trouble, eh, Dominick?" he said thickly.

Dominick reached out and pushed gently against Barry's chest with his finger tips. Barry toppled helplessly back into the chair, and evidently decided it was the better course of wisdom to stay put. Dominick walked over to the desk and poured a stiff shot of whiskey into Shanahan's emptied glass. He stuck it under Barry's nose.

"Drink this! You'll feel better."

Barry looked as though he wanted to refuse, but he took the glass and drained it, choking as the whiskey burned his throat. When he had regained his voice he looked at Dominick out of glowing, angry eyes.

"You hit me without giving me a chance to defend myself," he said. "I won't forget it."

"It's the only way I know of to deal with a heel," said Dominick coldly.

Barry tried to rise from his chair again, but the contemptuous look on Dominick's face dissuaded him.

"I don't personally care what you do with your life or your career here at Princeton," Dominick said harshly. "You've played the part of a spoiled brat for the last month. Things haven't gone smoothly for you and you haven't got the guts to face anything hard. You've acted toward Tyson as though you thought you were a little tin god, and when you got the works, you go squealing to papa! As if anyone would pay any attention to your old man if he *was* crazy enough to come down here and take your side! They'd just laugh at him."

"Dominick, you listen to me!" Barry cried. "You can't talk to me—"

"I can and will," said Dominick, "even if I have to slug you again to make you listen. There's something I'm going to get off my chest . . . something I've wanted to say to you for a long time. I came to Princeton because I wanted to be something like you and your brother. I'd never seen you at close range, but you looked like the real McCoy to me. Well, now I've *seen* you at close range and I've got the real low down. I know that arrogant front of yours is all a fake. You aren't a big-shot—you'd just *like* to be one. You never will be one because you're a pouting little yellow squirt! Princeton football will be well rid of you. Tyson's been stringing along with you because he thought you must have something of your father and your brother in you. But you've tipped your mitt to him now.

"But, I knew it before he did. I knew it when I found you couldn't take a hard tackle without getting sore." He drew a deep breath. "I was brought up to think you and your kind were important. Now, when I want to mix with your type, Trevor, I won't bother to hunt you up. I'll just look under a handy stone for something like you!"

Barry staggered to his feet again, and once more Dominick shoved him back in the chair.

"Tonight," he said, "Tyson, and the football squad, and Hope Loring, and myself are the only ones who know what kind of a worm you are. Tomorrow, when you quit the team and let out a blast against Tyson the whole college will know."

Dominick turned and went to the door. There he spoke once more. "There's only one reason I'm sorry you're quitting football, Trevor. I'm playing on the Omelettes beginning Monday—scrimmaging against the Varsity every week. I'm sorry you aren't going to be there, because before the season was done I'd give you a going over you'd never forget—one that would send you screaming with your tail between your legs to papa in earnest!"

He went out and slammed the door.

When he reached the entrance he found Shanahan sitting on the steps, smoking a

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cigarette and looking at the stars. He glanced up at Dominick with a quizzical expression.

"Should I get a doctor before I go back upstairs?" he drawled.

"You'd do better with a can of Flit!" snapped Dominick.

Down the block he took out his handkerchief and wiped fine beads of sweat from his forehead. "And don't get feeling too noble, Dominick," he said softly, to himself. "Forty-eight hours ago you were quitting yourself, and would have, but for *her!*"

CHAPTER X

THE WAY HOPE WANTS IT

MONDAY was a crisp fall day. The last touches of summer had gone out of the atmosphere. Leaves on the trees were gold and red and brown. Dominick found that morning a particularly long and restless one. He was impatient for his last class to end, impatient to get out to the field house. Today he was to make the acquaintance of Moxie Farrell's Scrambled Yeggs—the Omelettes! He had heard much about them from Hugh Stoddard on Sunday. They had been organized years ago by Nat Poe and the tradition was being carried on by Moxie, himself a great Princeton back of six years ago. The sole reason for their existence was to give the Varsity real opposition in its weekly scrimmages.

Dominick was to learn in the next few weeks that they were a very special sort of gang. There was none of the underdog quality to them that one senses in a Jayvee outfit. They were more than simply cannon fodder for the Varsity. They were a hard-hitting, rollicking football team that could hold its own with pretty nearly any college team in the country.

When Dominick entered the Field House that afternoon Moxie Farrell greeted him cordially.

"Hi, toots!" he bellowed. "I'm not going to introduce you to this gang of roughnecks. You'll get to know 'em quick enough. You'll find equipment over there on that table. Better grab whatever you find that's any good before someone else nails it."

Dominick found himself sitting on a bench in front of a locker that he was to share with a short stumpy-legged blond young man with a square jaw and bright blue eyes.

"You're Dominick, the Freshman wizard," he said. "I'm Jay Clark." There was nothing so formal as a handshake.

Dominick had heard of Clark. He was a Senior; a member of Tiger Inn, one of the big four clubs; and one of the most popular men in school. He had been disqualified for Princeton sports because he had played professional hockey. They said that when he graduated he would sign a contract with Lester Patrick's New York Rangers. Ineligibility had cost *him* nothing at Princeton—even if it had cost Princeton the services of a brilliant halfback.

Clark babbled on cheerfully as he laced his shoulder pads. "Looks like we're going to have our hands full making something out of those monkeys of Tyson's this year. They were crumby on Saturday! Had the game on ice and then handed it over on a silver platter."

Dominick felt completely at ease, and it surprised him. These boys were more like the gang he had played ball with in the summers. They were playing for the fun of it! There were no victories or defeats to break your heart over. There were no bitter rivalries.

"Any report on Red Dixon's condition?" he found himself asking Clark.

"Bad news," said Clark frowning. "Broken leg! Out for the season! And they're going to find out just how good he was when they start playing without him. Tyson's got to find himself a new blocking back and somebody else to back up his line. It's not going to be easy." He paused to wave at a burly-looking thug who came along the alley between lockers. "Hope you brought your knitting, Eddie. This is Dominick, the Freshman center who stood

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the Varsity on its ear all by himself. You guards'll be able to play your positions lying down with this guy to back you up. Dominick, this is Eddie Grant. I don't know what he's doing on this outfit. Manslaughter, wasn't it, Eddie?"

"I sabotage the high ideals of the young!" said Grant, in a somber voice. He looked appraisingly at Dominick. "You didn't get that back and those arms going to tea dances."

"Iron foundry," said Dominick, and realized it was the first time he hadn't felt just a little touchy about explaining his background. "Worked in a mill for nearly eight years."

"Just a little simple conditioning," laughed Clark. "Football is merely quiet relaxation to him—like ping-pong."

SOMEBODY else clattered up and pounded Grant on the back. "Hi, satchel-foot! It looks like tough weather ahead for you. I understand we're learning Columbia plays, and those Columbia linemen charge low. That'll be tough on that pot belly of yours."

"A coarse fellow," said Grant to Dominick, in a confidential tone. "Name of Rothrock. He's been in college something like fifteen years. Dumb as they come. He says the reason he's been here so long is because he made a vow to stay in college till we beat Army."

"Only we don't play Army," Jay Clark pointed out.

Rothrock grinned. "These guys don't understand the hold higher education has on me. Books . . . books! The Romance of learning! The thrill of discovering the musty epigrams of some long-forgotten medieval monk!"

"The only thing he ever read through to the end was the life story of Simone Simon," said Grant.

"Nuts, nuts!" said Rothrock. He looked at Dominick. "Moxie didn't lie."

"Don't fall for this soft soap, Freshman," said Grant. "These guys are just hoping you'll take some of the burden off their shoulders. They pretend they're he-men, but they're really just out here to battle inferiority complexes."

Dominick grinned and was about to reply when Moxie Farrell's voice cut in loudly. "If you girls are through with your afternoon gossip let's get out on the field and go to work!"

Out on the field the squad gathered around Moxie. There were just a few more than enough of them to make two elevens. There was no tension—no feeling that this was very important. Moxie addressed them as equals, not as a head coach might be expected to address a squad.

"A few of you are new to this outfit," he said. "What we do is learn a new set of plays every week. The scouts report on the Varsity's next opponent and we learn their plays and try 'em out on the boys. This week we've got it easy. Tyson's taking Williams in his stride and is concentrating on Columbia. So we start learning Columbia plays. Our scrimmage this week will be purely defensive, to give the Varsity a chance to polish up its attack."

"If any!" said Tom Rothrock, dryly.

"Quiet!" a half dozen voices bawled in unison.

"You guys are supposed to know fundamentals. If you don't you'll learn 'em by having your faces stepped on. Get out there and toss the ball around a while. In fifteen minutes I'll see if I can find eleven able-bodied guys who aren't too winded to make a team and we'll start learning these Columbia plays."

The next fifteen minutes were a sort of glorified rough house. Dominick had hardly moved from where he was standing when somebody threw a block at him that landed him on the seat of his pants. He got up grinning at Jay Clark who had been the offender.

"This is back-alley football!" Clark said, "Keep your eyes open or somebody'll break your leg."

They learned ball handling by tossing the ball around, forming sides which attempted to keep possession of the ball while another group tried to take it away. It was rough and hard and a lot of fun.

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Dominick realized in a few brief moments that most of these boys were first-rate players—instinctive ball handlers.

"We learn by the clinical method!" said a grinning husky, who tackled Dominick so viciously his teeth rattled as he was trying to get rid of the ball. He learned later that that was Bob McGraw who had played end at Illinois and was therefore not eligible for Princeton athletics.

After twenty minutes of this haphazard roughhousing which left Dominick a little breathless, Moxie reassembled them. He announced a first eleven and Dominick found himself at center, with Eddie Grant playing on one side of him, and a huge mountain of a lad named Koch on the other side. The atmosphere changed abruptly.

Dominick quickly learned that this part of the workout was taken with deadly seriousness. The one way the Omelettes could be of real use to the Varsity was to learn these enemy plays and run them off with smoothness and precision. It was surprising how quickly they got the hang of things.

Moxie evidently had detailed reports and the first thing they mastered was Lou Little's famous muddle-huddle, a method of coming out of the huddle in apparent confusion so that defense isn't prepared for the play until the last moment. There were no signals. In the huddle Larry Wells, the quarter, simply announced the formation and then said: "Off tackle slant—Rothrock carrying." Or: "Fake reverse—Clark through guard." Or: "Delayed buck—Hooker carrying."

After they had worked on these plays for nearly an hour, the second string, which had been following them up and down the field, took over. When the practice finally ended with the coming of darkness, Dominick went back to the field house with the others, tired but very content.

He was just pulling off his shoes when the Varsity squad, which had been practicing in the stadium, came trooping in. They looked tired and dejected. But the thing Dominick noticed—and which gave him a feeling of grim satisfaction—was the presence of Barry Trevor in uniform. For an instant Barry's eyes met his, and Dominick saw a deep-seated hatred in them. Well, that was okay! That tongue lashing had worked. Barry hadn't quit . . . which was the way Hope wanted it.

CHAPTER XI

BARRY LIKES OMELETTES

SHANAHAN'S reputation as a campus politician was not undeserved. Mr. Shanahan was not an athlete, nor was he a scholar. In an easy-going sort of way he managed to skim through his classroom work, devoting just enough effort to it to keep from gathering himself a flock of conditions. Shanahan's chief enjoyments in life were the developing of a certain genius as a gourmet, and the expert savoring of Scotch whiskey. Shanahan had a liking for the good things of life in general, and his father supplied him with an allowance which more closely resembled the income of a bank director than the average college boy's pocket money. Shanahan's clothes were expensive and unique. He bought his tweeds at the University Store and had an agreement with the proprietor that no duplicates of the material he bought should be sold. His shoes were made to order. He had shirts, ties and hats harmonize (or better yet—to disharmonize) with each of his twenty suits of clothes.

Having no orthodox talents which would bring him campus recognition, Shanahan had shrewdly decided to be a politician. If he backed the right men in college he might become known as a *deus ex machina*—a sort of campus ward-heeler. In Freshman year, politician Shanahan had decided upon Barry Trevor as the star to whom he would hitch his wagon. Barry was destined to be one of Princeton's great football players. Properly managed, he might become president of his class, make one of the best clubs, and be a big shot. If Shanahan managed Trevor properly, he, Shana-

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han, would ride through on Barry's coat tails to the same honors.

Thus, it was with considerable disquietude that Mr. Shanahan digested the gossip he heard as he allowed his round cheeks to be shaved in Jack Honore's barber shop. More than ninety percent of Princeton patronizes Jack Honore's, cashes checks there, and uses it as a clearing house and meeting place. The gossip there that morning was to the effect that Barry was not doing well on the team. He had antagonized Tyson. He was acting the part of a first-rate louse. It was hinted that the members of Tiger, who would certainly have invited Barry—and, incidentally, Shanahan—to become members at midyears, were cooling to Barry—and therefore to Shanahan.

Shanahan had reached a state of downright discouragement on that evening when Dominick brought a groggy Barry back to his room at Blair. But it was the first gleam of hope to come to Shanahan in days. Thus, when he returned to his room after Dominick's departure, Shanahan was feeling better.

Barry was storming around the study, kicking the furniture and practically frothing with fury. He glowered at Shanahan, and kicked the desk. Shanahan draped his rotund figure in an arm chair and waved airily.

"Kick away, my fine-feathered friend! I put the tobacco jar away before I left."

Barry said something unprintable. In fact he said a whole string of unprintable things.

"Quite a rough diamond, your factory-working Freshman friend," drawled Mr. Shanahan.

"I'll square this night with him if it's the last thing I ever do!" Barry said.

Shanahan nodded judicially. "Oh, unquestionably a necessity," he said. "In fact, if I were you, I would attend to it before I settled Tyson's hash. Tyson can wait, but when it gets around that you've been made to look an ass by a green Freshman . . . Well, it's regrettable." Shanahan lit a cigarette and watched the smoke curl ceilingward. "First he chisels in on your girl. Then he lugs you around the campus for all the world to see as if you were a stuffed dummy. Then he tells you off! I presume he *did* tell you off?

"Nobody calls me yellow and gets away with it!" Barry stormed.

Shanahan made a sympathetic, clucking noise. "Too bad neither you nor he are out for football any longer," he said. "You might have a chance to prove something."

"He's playing on the Omelettes," said Barry, darkly. "By gosh . . ." What he was about to say drifted off into a thoughtful silence.

"Makes your quitting very unfortunate," said Shanahan, sadly. "Of course the rumor will spread like wildfire that he knocked you for a loop. Your quitting on top of that may make it look as though you didn't relish coming up against him in scrimmage. Of course, I'll do my best to squelch any such talk, but you know what campus gossip is!" And Shanahan shrugged.

"I'm not quitting," said Barry grimly. "I'm going to give that meatball a dose of his own medicine."

Shanahan suppressed a smile. "But I thought you *had* quit! If you said all the things to Tyson you told me you did, you'll have to crawl back to him on your hands and knees to get another chance."

"Then I'll crawl!" said Barry, between tight lips.

AND he did crawl. Sunday afternoon he went to the little white cottage on the edge of the campus where Tyson lived. It was Tyson himself, dressed in flannels and a tweed jacket, pipe clenched between his teeth, who opened the door. His eyes were cold as they regarded Barry.

"Well?" he said, sharply.

"Can I speak to you a moment, sir?"

Tyson hesitated. Then he opened the door wider. "All right," he said. He led the way into a comfortably-furnished study and indicated a chair.

"I'd rather stand, sir," said Barry, stiffly.

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"Suit yourself," said Tyson, indifferently, stretching his long frame in an upholstered chair. He remained unencouragingly silent.

"Look here, sir," Barry blurted out, "I lost my head yesterday . . . said things I shouldn't have said."

"So what?" said Tyson, uncompromisingly.

"So I want to apologize."

Tyson struck a match and held it to the bowl of his pipe. "It would be rather melodramatic of me to refuse to accept it," he said.

"I want to go on playing football," Barry continued eagerly.

Tyson looked up sharply. "Can you take it?" he shot at Barry. "The boys are down on you—particularly after that act in the locker room."

The color rose in Barry's cheeks. "It's unfair of them to ride me for a mistake anyone might have made, sir!" he said.

Tyson's eyes glittered. "You're wrong, Trevor. You've played the part of a cocksure, know-it-all, big-shot from the first. If you put on an act like that you can't afford to make mistakes. Someone else might have made the same mistake and gotten sympathy. Not you, Trevor."

Barry swallowed hard. "I guess you're right, sir."

"You still want to come back on the squad, knowing that I don't like you and believing that I'll discriminate against you?" Tyson demanded.

Even Barry had to hesitate before answering that.

"Yes, sir," said Barry, in a small voice.

Tyson eyed him shrewdly for a moment. "You've got some reason for coming back, Trevor. I don't know what it is and I don't much care. You have the equipment to be a great football player. If you can whip your disposition you may get there. You can be certain of one thing. Whether I like you or not, when you show me that you're the best man for the job, you'll be a Varsity regular. If you can stand the gaff, report on Monday."

"Thank you, sir."

THAT first practice on Monday was even tougher than Barry had dreamed it could be. To say that the greeting he received when he went to the field house to dress was not cordial would be to misstate the facts. He received no greeting at all. He was ignored as completely as if he weren't there at all. In the preliminary warm-up when they reached the stadium the rest of the squad managed somehow to keep him from getting his hands on a football. He contented himself with running up and down the green turf, practicing quick starts. He had the uncomfortable feeling that everybody was watching him, wondering just how he'd take this sort of treatment. He tried to look unconcerned, tried to conceal the bitterness he felt. If they wanted to take him for this kind of a ride it was all right with him. He kept telling himself that he had a purpose, a reason for being here. He was going to show Dominick just how tough he was, when the time came—when they scrimmaged on Wednesday and Thursday.

Tyson and the coaches acted as though nothing had happened. Barry had to admit that. When the squad was called together for organized practice Barry was placed at left half on the third string. A boy named Taylor had been brought up from the Jayvees and was at right half. The chief concern of the coaches was to find the right man to fill in for Red Dixon, and they were using Craig and Al Huntzinger who had been the injured captain's understudies. The third string under Muscles Blondell, were put to running off the repertoire of plays. They worked on one play over and over until Blondell was satisfied that it was as smooth as they could get it. The whole squad seemed to be imbued with a sort of grim determination. The defeat by Penn and the injury to Dixon had killed any carefree spirit of optimism that might have existed before. A tough schedule loomed ahead—a schedule to be faced without Dixon, their key man and greatest bulwark of strength on defense and offense.

That practice was a long, wearing grind,

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and Barry was exhausted and dispirited when it ended. There was going to be no experimenting at left half until the coaches had found the right man to replace Dixon. That meant there was little chance of anyone noticing him. He was in this discouraged state of mind when they finally trooped back to the Field House. And then he saw Dominick, and felt dark anger rising up in him. It was worth any sort of grind to get his chance against the Omelettes' new center.

Tuesday practice was a duplicate of Monday's. But as they went out to the stadium on Wednesday Barry felt his heart beating rapidly against his ribs. Today they would scrimmage the Varsity. Sooner or later the third string would get its crack at Moxie Farrell's gang. When that moment came . . . !

Tyson was solely interested in polishing his offense for the Williams game. He had given the squad a brief blackboard talk the night before on Williams' plays, but he felt confident they could stand off the Purple attack. If their own plays clicked properly they'd have nothing to worry about. But the Varsity first string didn't do well against the Omelettes. Barry, watching the scrimmage from the bench, realized that Moxie's gang were really tough. Collins and McGraw, the Omelette ends, smashed the Varsity interference over as if it were composed of nine pins. Dominick and Tom Rothrock, backing up the line, smeared the ball carrier on play after play. Tyson, his face like a thundercloud, kept driving the Varsity hard, making criticisms and suggestions after each play. But they couldn't get going. Finally, when they shifted to forward pass plays they were equally ineffective. Jay Clark, Wells and Hooker, the Omelette secondaries, covered their territory like a tent, and the irrepressible Dominick kept charging through the Varsity line to worry and harass the passer. It was an exhibition that was not calculated to impress an observer with the power of the Princeton Varsity.

The second string took over presently and did a little better, partly because Moxie Farrell replaced Dominick, Rothrock, and several others, with his own second string. But even against this slightly weaker opposition the second stringers made no great headway.

IT WAS almost dark when Tyson finally signaled his third string to take over. For one bitter moment Barry thought he was not to have his chance against Dominick, but at this point Moxie sent his own first string back in. Barry's lips were tight set as he adjusted his headgear and bent over in the huddle. He'd show them just what he could do against Dominick!

It only lasted fifteen minutes, but in that time Barry absorbed the worst beating he had ever taken in his career. On the very first play he carried the ball off left tackle. Taylor, Brainerd, and Rudolph, the guard, headed his interference. With a sweeping sidewise block McGraw of the Omelettes smashed them down and Barry, stumbling forward toward a hole that was suddenly closed by Fisher, the Omelette tackle, swerved out in an attempt to slide around the end. Dominick hit him! Barry had been tackled hard before in his career, but never so hard as that. He was hurled back a good six or seven yards and his head hit the ground with stunning force. Somehow he clung to the ball. And then he heard Dominick, laughing.

Barry dragged himself to his feet, cold with fury. Two plays later he carried the ball again, and once more his blockers failed and once more Dominick hit him with all the fury of a tornado.

And so it went, play after play. Once, when a pass was called and he faded back to toss it Dominick came charging through at him. Barry saw that his receivers were covered. He tried to break and run. He dodged to the right, streaked for the sideline. If he could get around Dominick he knew he could outrun him. But Dominick was covering him like an annoying gadfly. Barry reversed himself, breaking one of the cardinal rules of the game by running back from the line of scrimmage . . . try-

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ing to circle away. It was no use. And suddenly Dominick cornered him and nailed him for a twenty yard loss.

On the very next play Barry was given the ball off-tackle again. Again Dominick loomed in front of him. Barry tried no dodging this time. He lowered his head and drove straight at Dominick with every ounce of power his churning legs could generate. The impact was terrific. He went down with Dominick on top of him. His head was spinning dizzily. Tyson's whistle was shrilling, and as he dragged himself to his feet he realized that he had gained a couple of yards, which meant he had actually driven Dominick back.

"That's all!" Tyson said.

Barry turned to him, quickly. "Just a few more plays, sir! I can take that guy!"

"That's *all!*" Tyson said, grimly. But a little smile twitched at the corners of his mouth as Barry turned away.

CHAPTER XII

CRESTFALLEN TIGER

PRINCETON really has only one football objective—to beat Yale. She may lose a half dozen games on her schedule, but if the Bulldog is taken into camp everything else is forgotten. All the same, no team likes to be drubbed on successive Saturdays by any opponents. Defeat was always a bitter pill for Tyson.

During the next three weeks the grim-faced head coach drove his squad with a sort of maniacal fury. What last shred of confidence the team had was given a bad shaking in the Williams game at the end of that first week. Instead of overwhelming the Little Three Champion, the Tiger found itself trailing 7—0 as they went into the last quarter, a team that had been completely outplayed by a lesser opponent. In the end the Tiger squeezed out a victory 14—7, but it was due almost entirely to superior man power. Tyson, able to send in fresh men who were nearly as good as his first string, finally battered down the weary Williams forwards who had no replacements of equal ability to spell them. It happened that Barry, not used till that final quarter, was the man who scored the first Tiger touchdown which led to tying the score. He carried the ball over on the same reverse that had worked against Penn. This time Tyson left him in the game, and he churned his way down the field again, carrying the ball repeatedly in a long march that finally led to the winning score, although it was Halligan who took the leather over the goal line. Barry was neither impressive nor unimpressive in this winning foray. The Williams line collapsed, and the Princeton forwards were opening up big holes. It was the line that really won.

During the next week the Varsity had a bad time. Using Columbia plays the Omelettes ran them all over the field, and defensively they continued to smear the Varsity attack. Tyson was faced with an unavoidable fact. He had not been able to unearth a suitable replacement for Red Dixon. Dixon's fine blocking had made his offense click. Neither Craig, Seaver, or Huntzinger filled the bill.

If the efforts to prepare for Columbia had not been so strenuous the grim battle that was going on in the scrimmages between Barry Trevor and Dominick might have got more notice from the other players. Barry, battered and bruised, continued to throw everything he had into those savage contacts with the Omelette center. His nerves were worn to the raw. Dominick was always laughing at him, always blocking his way. Scrimmages had become a personal duel between them, and with Barry's blockers effectively smothered by the Omelette ends and tackles it was an unequal duel. Barry played in the throes of a kind of impotent fury. Dominick was always on him, clawing at him, blocking him out, hurling him down with vicious tackles. Not once in those scrimmages did Barry get away from the roving center.

He would have been astonished if he'd heard a conversation between Tyson and Muscles Blondell the night before the Columbia game.

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Blondell said, "This Trevor has developed into just about the hardest-running back on the squad. Seems to me he just about rates a starting assignment."

Tyson shook his head. "He's carrying on a personal feud. He isn't half as good in a game. When he wakes up to the fact that this Dominick is actually teaching him to play football and he can turn on the same heat against an opponent, then we'll have something."

"I wish we had Dixon!" Blondell moaned. "Columbia's going to tear us apart tomorrow."

This turned out to be an accurate prophecy. Lou Little's low-charging line and his ends played the smashing style on defense that Moxie's Omelettes had been delivering, completely stalled the Tiger attack. There was no denying the fact that the blocking in front of the Princeton ball carrier was miserable. Columbia put on a first period attack that carried her to a score. Later in the game, Luckman, her star quarter, drop kicked a goal from the field, and the score was 9-0.

Another grueling week brought the coaches no nearer a state of satisfaction, nor did it bring Barry any nearer the accomplishment of his goal. Cornell was played that Saturday, and the Red team from Ithaca should have won. A brainstorm by her quarterback in the last quarter with Cornell leading 12—7 brought about defeat. Deep in Princeton territory the Ithacan field leader called for a forward pass which was neatly intercepted and carried some eighty-six yards for a score by Tex Brewer. The Tiger squeezed back into the winning column, but unimpressively.

ON THE Monday following the Cornell game Tyson assembled his squad in the Stadium. As he looked them over his lips tightened. They were a battered and discouraged group. The victory over Cornell had not raised their spirits to any degree. They knew they'd been lucky. They also knew that there were no breathing spaces ahead with Navy, Dartmouth, Harvard and Yale coming in that order.

Tyson's voice was less harsh, less rasping than usual as he addressed them.

"I'm not going into the mistakes we made in the Cornell game," he said. "We all know that our chief weakness is blocking in front of the ball carrier. Blocking is just as much an art as ball carrying, and it is the crux of any attack. With Red Dixon functioning we could—"

He paused and drew a deep breath. Only he knew that he was in reality addressing these remarks to just one man.

"I've tried to develop the kind of blocking we need. I'm not blaming those of you who have failed. But the fact remains that we haven't found the right man.

"This week, instead of scrimmaging on Wednesday and Thursday I'm starting with contact work today against the Omelettes. The Omelettes are tough, but they are no tougher than Navy will be on Saturday. For three weeks Dominick, the Omelette center, has been ruining our attack. Navy has a center in King who'll be just as tough.

"Instead of a scrimmage this afternoon, I'm going to turn you loose in two fifteen-minute periods against the Omelettes, played straight away like a game. They'll use Navy plays and Navy defensive formations against you. You haven't put any kind of dent in the Omelettes so far. I'd like to see you pull yourselves together and take them this afternoon."

He paused again. "But before we take the field," he said slowly, "I'd like to ask if there is anyone on the squad I may have overlooked who thinks he might have the ability to play the blocking back role on the team and *keep Dominick out!*"

Tyson had hardly got the words out of his mouth before Barry Trevor spoke up. "I'd like to have a shot at it, sir."

Lew Tyson's lips twitched at the corners. There was a curious light of satisfaction in his cold gray eyes.

"Okay, Trevor, we'll give you a shot at it!" he said crisply.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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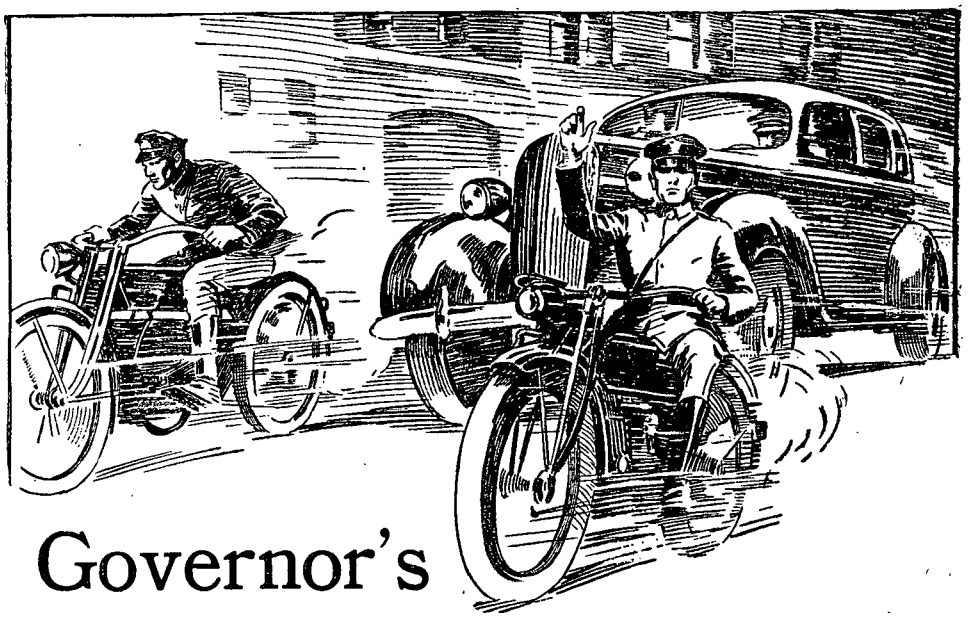

Governor's Escort

By HENRY F. CHURCH

Author of
"Great Study, Chemistry,"
"Meat for the Grinder," etc.

BIG ANGUS McCANNON, like a khaki-clad, leather-putteed Colossus, braced the throbbing motorcycle, as it idled back of the Governor's limousine, and snatched a forbidden smoke. "Well," he told Doggy Petros, his fellow patrolman, "so far as I'm concerned, the pee-rade'll end smack at the State line. I've got a date."

"If the Skipper says so—yes," answered Petros, "otherwise we're more than likely to roll right into the White House grounds, along with him. You better call off that date—if you've got one." Small, dark, and saturnine, Doggy looked dwarfed beside his huge, ruddy companion, but there was a proud tilt to his cap, and a jaunty squareness to his shoulders, telling plainly that he knew he was a darn good little man, personally picked at par with the giant McCannon, as escort to the Governor.

McCannon snorted. "Have I got one! Do hear the little man! Well, even the *Skipper* knows he can't take us beyond the State line. Nerts, I say, with all this sashaying around to fish-fries, beauty contests, and conferences! Eight thousand plus on the old mill this month, alone. I got corns where I oughn't have corns, just from sleeping in the saddle. What's he going to do in Washington, tell the President how to balance the budget?"

"I wouldn't know," said Doggy, "but he told Pershing how to win the war, didn't he?"

"You oughta know, you were his dog-robber. I didn't see much of him. I was up in the line."

"Yeah, Dugout Angus, I remember. We picked you up out of one, on our way back from the Occupation. Say, what you reckon's keeping the Skipper? He's been in the courthouse an hour now, and he said to stand by for ten minutes, and him supposing to be running on schedule! Let's go snatch a dog and a beer."

"That's one way of getting him started," grouched McCannon. "Just try to eat, and out he'll pop like a bat out of sulphus! But that's a dog-robber all over—to the devil with duty, just so you get your belly

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full. Me, I was a fighting man, and I know how to take orders. Wake up Chocolate, there, and see if he can make contact."

DOGGY PEDROS reached down and scooped up a sizable pebble, and bounced it off the kinky skull of the sleeping chauffeur. "Yassuh, Mistuh Gub'nor, yassah!" the latter grunted coming to alert attention and grasping the wheel.

"Go inside," ordered McCannon, talking from habit out of the side of his wide-slit mouth, "and tell the hot shot to step on it. He's holding up traffic."

"Not *me*, Mistah Mac!" argued Chocolate. "Ah done dat once befo'! Ah don't mind repo'tin' *on* him, but Ah ain't gonna adwance no suggestions *to* him!" He climbed out and disappeared beyond the tall white pillars of the courthouse, where a capacity crowd filled even the porch. Shortly he returned, grinning.

"He jest reach de point whar he says 'De on'y Red Ah count-enances in dese United States is in de stripes ob dat gran' ole flag.' "

"Bananas, he's off on that one, huh? That means twenty-two minutes more—twenty-five if he's hiccoughing. I guess we can eat, after all, Doggy," McCannon conceded. "C'mon. You, Chocolate, stand by the bus."

Pedros said sternly: "And that means stay there, guy. The last time we left you on duty and went to eat, someone stole the car, and the Skipper didn't like that."

"Ah was ready fo' him," boasted Chocolate. "Dat t'ief run out'n gas befo' he was went five miles!"

Leaving their motorcycles, they went down the street to a small restaurant where a solitary waitress, red of hair and bored of expression, served them.

"What's all the crowd, beautiful?" asked McCannon guilelessly. He liked to sound out public opinion about his boss, because the Governor always had a ready ear hanging out to catch that sort of chatter.

"Old Windbag's in town."

"You mean His Excellency?"

"You heard me the first time. He'll spoof 'em all through lunchtime, then they'll be too full of patriotism to eat. What you boys in town for?"

"We heard it was a riot."

"It's a riot, all right. I thought maybe you was after 'em bank-thieves. A feller from the F.B.I. was in here yesterday, looking 'em up."

Professional curiosity got the better of McCannon's political acumen. "You mean 'em safecrackers who took the Balltown bank and hauled it away in the bank president's limousine?"

"I reckon so. All I know is what I hear over the counter."

Big Angus leaned over and whispered to her confidentially. She looked pleased. "Sure," she told him. "Any time after nine."

THE girl collected for Doggy's lunch, and rang up a *No charge* for Big Angus. The latter said testily: "There's an example, Doggy. Here we go 'round tooting sirens, with little State flags on our handlebars, wet-nursing the Skipper when we oughter be blockading roads. Well, let's roll, we've used up twenty minutes of that twenty-two."

The crowd on the courthouse porch was thinning. Pedros stopped with a horrified gasp. "Do you see what I see, Angus?" he queried, pressing his hand to his brow.

"You mean what you *don't* see!" growled McCannon accusingly. The space where the Governor's car had stood was vacant.

Down the street in the direction of the restaurant, a large black car was rolling out from the curb; and, with sirens open, they scattered the crowd as their motorcycles leaped after it. Neatly they split on either side of the departing car and came to a V-shaped stop ahead of it. A hard-faced man, with a cigarette drooping from thin lips, was at the wheel and he promptly stepped on the brakes in answer to Doggy's stop-signal.

Big Angus hauled him unceremoniously through the window and tossed him in the

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road. "I oughter slap you through the cement!" he growled.

"What the—" the man began.

Pedros came up. "Stick him back in and let's get going," he advised. "He's got New Jersey license-plates! Our error, fellow."

Leaving the astonished motorist to puzzle it out, they raced back to the courthouse, but the lone citizen on the porch was deaf and their excited questions didn't register. The crowd as a whole had repaired down the street to listen to the outraged motorist who had now found voice and was uttering loud yawps of indignation.

"I wouldn't care to go back there," said Big Angus. "we'd just get into words, and we'd be bound to run into the Skipper. Losing that crate twice in a month ain't going to improve his temper any. Let's head north and ask at a filling station."

The station-tender remembered a big black car flying a State flag on its radiator. Except that it was making plenty of time, he could give no further information.

FIVE miles beyond, the main road divided to converge again at the town of Bunchville. Playing safe they each took a branch, and met again with nothing to report. The lone policeman of the town was scribbling on a pad when they swept in. Yes, he had got their number all right, and they had nearly got him while he was getting it. Tough-looking fellows, by gravy! He thought he'd seen one of them with a machine gun. How many? Oh, three, five, or six, they were going so fast he wasn't sure.

McCannon grabbed the pad from his shaking hand. "There's the bad news!" he told Pedros, holding up the notation for him to read. Away they roared, and, beyond a small town, which was strange to them, they came suddenly upon a barricade, with grim-faced deputies lining the ditches.

"What's the big rush?" demanded a stout man with a sheriff's star on his sweating shirt.

"Bank-robbers stole the Governor's car," growled Big Angus, ill-humoredly. The sudden stop, necessitated by the barricade, had burned his feet through the soles of his heavy service shoes.

"They didn't come through here. Besides how could they steal his car when he's got it in Europe?"

"Don't be funnier than you look. We're his escort. He ain't in Europe."

"Maybe you're talking about some other governor—or maybe you're just phony cops in cahoots with 'em robbers! Put the irons on 'em boys! This is a big catch!"

The battle was brief, but satisfactory to both sides. When it was over, the Governor's escort was disarmed and pinioned, but four deputies lay blinking on the side of the road. Strange to say McCannon was back in good humor.

"That's a good one on you!" he jeered at the sheriff. "Reach in my inside pocket and you'll find my credentials."

The sheriff reached and found. "Huh! whyn't you stay in your own State?" he growled.

A light broke on Big Angus. "How about unlocking these bracelets?" he demanded.

"Sure, after you pay the magistrate your fine for speeding. Couple you boys—no, make it six—take 'em over to the magistrate!"

The delay cost them an hour, and ten dollars each, and they returned to the barricade to get their motorcycles. "Come down and see *us*, sometime!" invited McCannon, as the sheriff handed back their working tools. "Now, you got your minor duties off your fat chest, did you see a black limousine flying the flag of a *real* state, go through here?"

"Yep, we let 'em through. They was harmless looking. They went north."

"I won't trust myself to comment!" sighed Big Angus and climbed on his machine.

WHEN the barricade was well behind them he said to Pedros, "Since we paid for some speed, let's use it. We've got to get that car back, or we're both out of jobs!"

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"Jobs ain't the half of it!" Pedros contended. "Me, I'm willing to run up one hundred more miles on State time, and, if we don't catch 'em by then, I'm on my own. I always wanted to go to the Pacific Coast, anyway."

From time to time, while picking up gas, they picked up information that the car they sought was ahead of them and traveling fast. They ran into no more barricades, but they had to race with an irate patrolman, who pressed them hard and emptied his forty-five in their general direction before giving up the chase. Doggy was for shooting back at him, but McCannon discouraged him.

At long last they came to a filling station where the flag-flying car was reported only half an hour ahead of them. "Your gas is leaking," the station-tender informed Pedros.

"Well, I hope to kiss a pig if that flatfoot didn't crease my tank!" howled the little man. "Whyn't you let me shoot him, Angus, when I got the idea?" He pressed a finger against the abrasion, and the scored metal gave under the pressure and let the gasoline out in a flood.

Pedros rolled the useless machine under the shed. "Gimme a memorandum receipt for that," he ordered the station-man, and, five minutes later, was clinging to McCannon's thick waist as he bounced precariously on two inches of spare seat.

Fifty miles beyond they sighted a large black car taking on gas at a roadside station, and dismounting, down the road, deployed and flanked it. The driver, seeing them coming, scrambled out and raced into a nearby thicket. He was fast and thin, but he lacked endurance, and they caught up with him two miles off the highway. He turned out to be the man McCannon had dragged through the window.

"You're getting to be an unpleasant habit!" sneered the wheezing man, as they marched him back. "Somebody's going to hear about this!"

"Sure," agreed McCannon, "you've got a swell suit against the State—if it wants to be used."

They left him at his car and went down the road to retrieve the motorcycle. McCannon scratched his sun-bleached hair. "We left it right there!" he announced in a puzzled tone."

"*You* left it right there," said Pedros. "I was only a passenger. Hey, *you!*" The last was directed at the sullen motorist, who had paid for his gas and was climbing back into the car. The man leaped for the steering wheel, and tripped, to fall headlong under it. A second later Pedros dragged him out by the legs. "This car's commandeered!" he informed him and took it over.

McCANNON picked up the sprawling man and, after relieving him of a gun, dumped him in the back seat. "Officer Pedros is commandeering this car," he said, in order to keep the record straight, "and you can add the rent of it to that juicy suit you're going to slap on the State."

Lingering only long enough to give the description of the lost motorcycle and to check on the Governor's car, which they learned had just preceded them, they took up the chase, McCannon joining the man in the rear seat.

The owner of the black car had lapsed into a vast and frigid silence, and that suited McCannon completely. After a while Mac climbed over the front seat and joined Pedros, twisting the mirror so that he could keep their unwilling host in sight. It was a good car with soft seats, and he settled down in luxurious relaxation. The prospects of a fight with a machine-gun-armed crew, bothered him not at all. Both he and Pedros wore the medals of pistol experts on their blouses, and they were skilled in the art of surprise attack. He was certain, now, that the stolen car would come eventually into their possession, and, counting on the Governor's affection for them as old soldier to old soldiers, he hoped that the recovery would square things—maybe.

He knew that the Governor wouldn't be late for the Washington appointment—he

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was a man of resource and undoubtedly was already en route by plane, or at least by fast train.

"Yes, everything is rosy," McCannon informed Pedros; and a loud bang, followed by a whistling hiss, punctuated his comment.

Instinctively McCannon crouched down in his seat, and then—remembering that in the war the whistling sound had come first and the bang last—looked up sheepishly at Pedros, who was skillfully keeping the car out of the ditch.

"Flat tire!" Pedros snarled.

"Everything," McCannon said, "happens to us. Ain't it fun?"

To their chagrin, the car carried no serviceable spare, so they slipped on a detachable wheel bearing a dilapidated tire, and laboriously *clopped* into a filling station several miles beyond. Here the two pooled their meager resources, and chafed at the delay while the punctured tire was being repaired.

"Knock out the wheel and you can keep the rubbish," McCannon told the attendant, but the owner protested earnestly. It seemed that he had piled up thirty thousand miles on the ruined tire and wanted it as a museum piece.

"You're the owner," growled Big Angus, and threw the relic into the back of the car. The man seemed to be grateful and offered them cigarettes which they accepted.

"I'm getting your slant to all this, boys," said the owner, almost pleasantly, "and I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, if you'll hurry up and catch the birds who took your car, and give me back my crate, so I can keep an important conference in Jersey City in the morning."

"Yeah, we were all heated up over that," admitted Big Angus. "We cops have got a worrisome job at best, brother."

THE stranger had by now thawed to the point where he bought beer all around, and by the time that they started again comparative harmony prevailed among the black car's occupants.

"Well," said their host, after a while, "I'll even go so far as to write to the Governor that you boys were on the job every second."

"That would be nice," contributed Pedros, "but I still think you oughter sue the State. I'll be a witness."

"You're all right, bo," said McCannon, "even if you are from New Jersey."

The added delay had thrown them so far back in the chase that they didn't pick up the trail of the flag-bedecked car until five towns further along. "We're hot," McCannon said, after a talk at a filling station, "they're only twenty minutes ahead of us!"

Try as they might they couldn't reduce that margin. Darkness settled and it started to rain, but they plowed on. Soon the roadside stations closed for the night and they began to worry about the long stretches between towns where late service might be found. Another element of delay entered. Much precious time was being wasted in convincing sleepy attendants that their credit should be good. In direct ratio to the distance traveled this routine persuasion became more difficult, until they reached the end of their cerdit. Then their host, who had been sleeping, condescended to buy.

Taking advantage of their gratitude, he advanced a suggestion which had been brewing in his mind. "If you'll give me back my gat, I'll stand in with you boys on this," he offered. "You might need me."

McCannon passed over the weapon. "You're a right guy!" he said with feeling. "Pedros was right about that suit on the State. I'll be a witness too. Hey! You've got notches on that gun!"

"I should have," replied the stranger modestly. "I've helped clean up two bank gangs. Of course you've heard of the F.B.I.?"

"Aw, for fish' sake, mister," murmured McCannon, humbly, "you make me feel as low as a whale's belly, and that's on the bottom of the sea!"

"Forget it. We all have the same objective."

"What did you run away from us for?" asked Pedros suddenly.

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"You're entitled to an explanation. I've been tangled up before with the rural police, and once stayed in the cooler three days before I could convince them. Cost me six months' extra work on a case I was all ready to spring. By the way, Brandon's my name, and I'm working out of Jersey City."

They shook hands.

"Give the guy back his bullets," said Pedros.

"Sure," agreed McCannon. "How utterly careless of me!"

THE fugitive car seemed intent on following the national highway, so they held steadily to that same cement ribbon. In the small hours of the morning Pedros asked sleepily: "What state you reckon we're in?"

He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and did a pretty impressive yawn.

"What state did you say?" he demanded, coming out of it. "Just name a state. Any one at all."

"Virginia," said Brandon. "We're just south of Alexandria. You better step on it, Officer Pedros, there are several ways out of that town. And we might lose them."

Pedros obeyed and nearly crashed into a barrier that blocked the road. Directly ahead of them the much-wanted car of the Governor was limned out in the glow of electric torches, as armed men questioned the driver.

With their borrowed car still rolling, Officers McCannon and Pedros leaped out and charged up, but stopped as a familiar voice reached them. "Yassuh," Chocolate was saying, "he a Gub'nor all right, goin' up to see de Big Boss in Washin'ton, but him sleepin' jest now, an' him don' lak' to be wake up! Yuh-all kin wake up he own secretary, Mistuh Smiff, he'll gib yuh-all de password."

Chocolate opened his mouth to show an enormous number of mastodon teeth. It might have been a grin, but it looked much more like hunger.

McCannon said: "Doggy, let's go back and ask that federal dick to give us a lift as far as Jersey City, and we can hitchhike over to New York and catch out a cattle-boat to wherever cattle-boats go."

Mr. Brandon was already at the wheel and making a quick turn when they hurried up.

"Hey!" they called simultaneously, and he took a shot at them through the windshield.

From the direction of the barricade there came the sound of shouts and running feet, and the beams of light from the electric torchs picked up, in sharp outline, the rear of Mr. Brandon's now rapidly departing car.

The Virginia policemen saw some neat teamwork. As if in an exhibition, the two partolmen from farther south dropped each to one knee; and their guns, speaking in unison, shot out the rear tires of the rapidly moving car, so that it whirled dizzily and turned over. When the Virginians arrived the stunned driver was cuffed snugly to the brawny wrist of Big Angus.

He was swearing a good deal and making vicious observations about Angus' lineage. Angus pushed him in the face—twice—and he sort of shut up.

"Good work!" said a police lieutenant. "That's Slippery Sampson, Public Enemy Number One, wanted for the Balltown bank stick up! How did you fellows get in the picture?"

"Aw, we've had him all along," yawned Pedros. "We was bringing him up for Uncle Sam. I think you'll find the swag in that spare tire he had such a liking for."

The Governor came up and was advised of the situation. "What you two boys doing up here?" he demanded gruffly, but there was an undertone of pride in his voice.

Chocolate broke the embarrassed silence, "Ah reckon Ah fo'got to tell 'em, Mistah Gub'nor, yuh-all didn't need 'em no furder den dat cote-house! Maybe I shoulda tole 'em dat." And he grinned broadly.

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Old Gus Takes Over

By

BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF

Author of "A-Yachting We Will Go," "Guardian of the Gold," etc.

CAPTAIN ENGLES paced jerkily on the deck of the heavily laden old bark lying just inside the breakwater at Cape Town. His mutton-chop whiskers danced to the mouthing of a quid of tobacco and his rheumy old eyes sparkled. By holding his narrow shoulders high he conceived the idea that he was as big as a man need be to handle any situation.

"I've licked my luck, mister," he chortled, noting the bumboat putting out from the shore and nodding to indicate it. "I've come it over as bad a streak of trouble as any sailin' cap'n has struck of late years. Nothin' before us now but a swift run home with a crew of white men instead of them stinkin' niggers. You can't keep a good man down, mister, not even with fallin' freight-rates, cargoes goin' to snortin' steamers, and the whole South Atlantic piled aboard of him with a hurricane boostin' it."

The mate, gloomily studying the distant boat, made no response. Forty years younger than the animated old skipper, he was easily forty years older in his outlook.

"They don't look like sailors to me," he growled, studying the men.

Captain Engles bristled, thought of a good retort, then thought better of it. "Get 'em aboard, mister, and get sail onto her," he finally snapped. "London's pullin' on the tow rope. We've a fair wind and a full ship."

The boat came alongside and spewed a motley assortment of destitute humanity up the ladder. They looked like the last recruits of the Salvation Army, scraped from the lowest dives in town. There was not a seaman's cap, a pair of boots, a suit of oilskins, nor dunnage of any description among them.

"And what," demanded the big mate, his doubled fists on

"Grab the yard," the mate yelled. "Grab it before she dismasts!"

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his hips and his elbows wide, "do you call these beauties? There ain't a sailor in the lot, you double-crossin' crimp."

The stocky individual in the dented derby chewed a little more savagely at the burned-out cigar stub and continued to herd his black sheep up the ladder. "I ain't guaranteein' to deliver anybody old-fashioned British Navy stick-and-string crews these days," he snarled. "I contracted to supply men and here they be. It's up to you to make sailors of 'em."

"This one ain't a man," howled the mate, jabbing a forefinger at a weaving old wreck. "He's only a corpse waitin' to be hauled to the potter's field or clouted up in canvas and heaved to the fishes. Shove him back ashore and let the town bury him."

THE bleary-eyed old scarecrow thus singled out, weaving and staggering but flashing resentment out of rheumy blue eyes heavy with bloodshot, threw back his head.

"'Ten t'ousan' Svedes yoomped out of da veeds at the Battle of Copenhagen," he roared in lusty song.

Then he sobered instantly, still weaving but struggling to hold his palsied head immobile. "I see *you* dead und gone yet, you vood-scow sailor," he boasted loudly. "Ol' Goos show you a t'ing or two about sailin' a ship. He forget more about da sea dan you effer learn."

The mate lifted an angry hand and slapped the back of it across those tobacco-stained stumps of teeth. Old Gus lurched back against the rail, tensed as if to hurl his feeble old body forward in combat. His hand groped at the waist as if to grasp the sheath knife that had gone for another drink of rotten whiskey ashore.

"Come on. Come on," invited the mate, his balled fists lifted in an attitude of defense. "If you want to fight, let's have it and get it over with. I can see I've got to knock a lot into these heads."

Old Gus shook his head to clear it of the heat of that slug of whiskey the crimp had given him.

"I know too mooch about sea law to yoomp on you," he shrugged. "Sailor got no chance ven da company hire da lawyer. Old Goos know too much to strike back."

The hand shot out again, slapping viciously. The mate took another threatening step forward, backing the crouched old body against the rail. It was plain that he intended to vent his anger against fate on this defenseless old man.

"Avast there, mister," snapped Captain Engles tartly. "He's old, but he's a sailor. Leave him alone. Save your strength to pound a little seamanship into the rest of 'em."

The mate wheeled, his face dark with angry blood, cords twitching in his taut throat.

"He's only shark-feed, sir," he insisted. "We need real men aboard if we strike more luck like we've known."

"The man's a sailor—and years younger than me. Accept him."

It was a command, not a suggestion. The mate stood glowering into the old captain's eyes. Bulking fully eighty or a hundred pounds heavier than the skipper, he sought to overawe him. But Captain Engles had just whipped a fate that had dismasted him, driven him across the South Atlantic, and seemingly put him out of the one lucrative job his square-rigged vessel could expect a year, the Australian grain-trip. Having refitted by a miraculous juggling of costs and available material, and picked up a cargo by hiring cheap Negro sailors to handle his old ship along the coast where no respectable steam freighter would idle, he had combined lighterage and steam-freight costs in a single trip for his old bark which promised a profit. That triumph was more than enough to make him cocky in the face of a disgruntled mate.

"You heard me," he snarled. "Get about it."

The mate nodded grimly at old Gus as the skipper rolled forward with the exaggerated assurance of a bantam rooster that has just crowed defiance at a turkey gobbler. "I take you in my watch, old

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man," he growled, "where I can look after you."

"Dat suit me," flared Gus. "I get a chance to see all your mistakes und tell you vat you do wrong."

It was no way to talk to an immediate superior, but Gus was wild with anger. Too frequently of late he had been passed by when crews were shipped, just because he looked old and weak. Deep within the old sailor lurked a resentment that stubbornly refused to be brooked or broken.

"I'll show you you belong ashore in an old sailors' home, you old shark bait. I'll wear you down."

WATCHING the old figure scamper aloft like a boy, passing younger men in the futtock shrouds and the footropes, his temper did not sweeten. Noting that the old hands did not fumble when it came to casting off gaskets and shaking out sail, his scowl deepened. Then the Old Man swung near him as the anchor was coming up and capped the mate's wrath by nodding forward, where Gus was inspiring the crew with a hearty old sea chanty, and chorting, "There's a sailor for you, mister. What did I tell you? Know my men, mister, as I know my sea. When you can tell a sailor as far off as you can see him you'll be ready for command yourself."

The mate, like old Gus, knew better than to vent his anger on its cause. But he was craftier than the old sailor and restrained the insolent remarks that boiled and seethed within his narrow cranium. Let them cook and stew into a portion of hate for the old sailor. Let him catch what should have been the captain's lot.

Gus caught it. There are always plenty of nasty work-up jobs on any ship that a carping mate can hand out to his enemies in the crew. Gus got them all.

Yet through it all the old sailor grinned that fixed smile, threw back his old head, and chanted lustily:

Ten t'ousan' Svedes yoomped out of da veeds
At the Battle of Copenhagen.

"Stow that howlin'," snarled the mate, "and give the men a hand stowin' that jib."

Old Gus grinned, winking at the sailors who were fighting vainly to spill the wind from a headsail that kicked and thrashed and billowed in spite of their combined efforts to get it in.

"I am salt-vater sailor," he roared above the gusty wind. "I know how to take in a yib alone but I don't know dem monkey vay you vood-scow sailor use."

The mate started toward him. Old Gus stood his ground and grinned.

"Dey been a half hour playin' your way," he jeered. "I stow her myself in ten minute, if you call dem avay und let me show you how."

"Get up there and lend a hand," savagely, "or I'll break every bone in your body."

"Just a minute," called Captain Engles.

The mate wheeled, his fists balled. Belligerently he took a step toward his master, but Engles ignored him.

"Try it your way, old man," he called. "The rest of you stand by and watch him."

The mate turned, ready to sneer. The old *Boma* was heeled well over to the squall. If the old fool got jerked overboard for his pains the ship would be well rid of him and the mate would be justified.

Taking the sheet that the other sailor had been vainly trying to haul in, only to lose it again as a fresh gust struck, Gus cast it completely away, to whip in the wind. Then he hauled down the spilled canvas, stowed it expertly, grinning as he lashed it and humming his little song to himself.

Captain Engles nodded with a satisfied birdlike jerk and strutted off. The mate went purple with anger. Although he could have seized the two old men and bashed their heads together with very little effort, he knew that he was powerless.

He was still fuming three days later when the sudden squall struck. His disposition was not improved at all by the guilty knowledge that he had been brooding at the sea instead of looking off to watch the

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approaching weather. He thought himself lucky that the Old Man was below, taking a nap.

BUT the old *Boma* had been refitted cheaply and a poor yard had gone aloft. That sudden gust that laid the old bark over on her beam ends was not content to hit by surprise. It struck again and again with ever-increasing force until the third mighty buffet snapped the yard at the shackle, yanked the toggles clear, and let the sail billow and slat forward with a terrific thunder. Meanwhile those severed arms, jagged at their broken ends, held only near the tapered ends, thrashed and jerked and stabbed and pounded about madly as gust after gust succeeded those first buffets and played havoc with that wallowing sail.

"Aloft and fish them yardarms," screamed the mate, who foresaw a bawling out from the skipper. "Get the lead out of your pants. Do you want 'em to tear her standin' riggin' down? Scamper up there and make 'em fast before they dismast us."

But the men were not hardy sailors. Resentful of the discipline, embittered by the mate's constant bullying and abuse, they jeered at him with their eyes. Not one of them except old Gus moved and he started up the port shrouds like a monkey, his experienced old eyes watching that flailing stick as the splintered end gyrated wildly above him.

"Get going, you," bellowed the mate, advancing upon the others, his fists knotted, his ugly face thrust forward.

"Let the old guy fish 'em," called one of the men.

"Yah, 'e's bloody well tellin' us 'e's a syler. We're sick av the likes av 'im mykin' monkeys of us. Let 'im fish 'em."

The mate threw back his head, glowering up at Gus, who had hesitated in his climb, watching that mad yardarm dangling and kicking and stabbing.

"Get goin', you old fool! Look alive up there! Them stays won't last forever."

Gus whipped out the sheath-knife the slop chest had provided and grinned down at him. Holding on with a crooked elbow, he grabbed the thrashing buntline as it whipped past.

"Get that yardarm, you idiot," shrieked the mate. "Lay hold of it. Never mind the rope until you grab the yard. I'll send somebody aloft to bring seizing once you've cottoned to it."

Old Gus went on grabbing for the buntline as if he had not heard. That fixed smiled was on his face as his great hand closed over the slatting rope and his sheath-knife flashed.

"Grab the yard! Grab her and stop her mad hooroar before she dismasts us."

Still the old sailor fumbled with the buntline, hauling it in as the gusty wind gave slack, taking a turn around the stay, hauling again. He needed only to feel to attend to his job and he could turn his mocking old eyes down at the howling mate. The cowering crew hated him because he had outdared them, because he alone braved the mate's anger, because he daily showed up their blundering inefficiency. The mate hated him for his provocative calm, for his unceasing mockery, for his perverse assurance that he was a better sailor.

But this time the mate knew that he could shame the old man. With a bellow of rage he swarmed up the starboard ratline, his head tipped back to watch that yardarm above him, his jaw thrust pugnaciously forward and up.

"Watch me, you scared idiot," he howled. "I'll show you how a man'd do it. There's nothin' to be afraid of, if you go right on about your job."

He looked across at Gus and saw that the old sailor had looped the end of his length of buntline and was trying to snare that stabbing arm as the jagged end whipped over him.

"What do you think you are, a cowboy?" he jeered.

He fought upward past the level where the older figure was still holding on with that crooked elbow and bracing to make another cast. The splintered starboard end

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of the yard jabbed down past the burly mate and he reached to seize it, but it yanked aloft with another of those gusts that kept billowing the whipping sail.

"Just grab it and smother it down, like this," he screamed tauntingly.

The partially freed canvas took another trip aloft as far as its straining tethers would admit, then swooped deckward. That flailing yardarm, struggling like a live thing, tossed and jerked. The severed end went lifting high, then shot downward like the stab of a mighty stiletto.

The mate braced himself to wrap an arm around it as it passed. His great body was tensed and waiting. His great apelike arm was bent and ready. But the stick veered a few inches, aimed directly at him, and stabbed viciously.

He was too taut to move aside, too fixed mentally and physically to jerk from its path. Driven by pile-driver power, the splintered end as sharp as a pike, the yard jabbed into his neck fully two feet, tore him from the shrouds, lifted him as a child lifts an impaled apple on a sharpened bit of shingle for a throw. Then another lift and slat of the sail sent the quivering body arching far off, to strike with a sickening *whump* across the solid rail of the poop and bound into the sea, leaving a spread of red behind as it sank like a plummet.

On the opposite shrouds, unmoved by the sudden tragedy that left his shipmates weak-kneed below him, old Gus continued his work. His little noose grew bigger, swung around his head, was cast at the port mate of that murderous stick.

The wind beat the line back against him. His second cast whipped far by the target. His noose refused to open on the third.

"'E ain't goin' to myke it," moaned the Cockney, his thin head shaking. "This 'ere bloody ship's Jonahed, s'elp me."

The pathetic noose went out again, again fell short. Old body braced, the bitter end of his line made fast to the solid stay, Gus tried again and again.

The thrashing stick jabbed and stabbed at the shrouds. Footropes parted under the battering. The steel cable of the taut stays began to fray in ragged, twisted strands. The splintered end, battering into a pulp but still able to do damage, continued to flay wildly.

Then the stabbing yardarm shot down through the cast noose, was snubbed by a quick jerk on the line. Fighting and jerking like a harpooned blackfish, the stick slowly ceased its mad gamboling, reluctantly responding to those old muscles that straightened the tugging buntline and drew it ever shorter and shorter with that safety turn around the big stay.

A RELUCTANT cheer went up for the old seaman as he finally lashed the stick securely and went on up past it to slash the other flailing end free quickly from above, releasing the top of the wild canvas and leaving it to spill and slat.

Captain Engles, summoned from his nap by the wild behavior of his vessel, had watched that flight of his mate's body and the old sailor's eventual triumph.

"I'm makin' you bo's'n," he said to Gus, as the old sailor slid to the deck. "Mister Jameson goes first and the bo's'n becomes second mate. That was a fine piece of work."

"I don' vant to be bo's'n. Better I be yoost a sailor."

For a minute the Old Man stared at him incredulously. Then his head pecked like a disconcerted bird's. "Those're orders," he snapped tersely.

"You'll get plenty of work as bo's'n," said Jameson meaningly as the skipper stumped away aft. "Holden was right about you. We'll be cloutin' you up in canvas yet before we sight England." This old fool was a jinx all right. Behind Jameson's dislike lay a superstitious terror.

Old Gus grinned good-naturedly and wiped the back of his hand across salty lips.

"I hope you wrong dere," he chuckled.

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"I don' vant to live forever but I like to have me anudder good drink of rum or vhiskey before I go."

"We'll wipe that grin off your face," blustered Jameson. Envy danced in his piggish eyes. "We'll show you what it means to be the Old Man's pet aboard here."

The weather conspired to help him worry the old sailor. No sooner did one storm die and light canvas blossomed on the yards than another heaved into sight and the poles must be stripped in frantic haste. Captain Engles nursed his canvas as if it had been the finest gold leaf. Light gear went down and heavy replaced it at every sign of foul weather. Then, as soon as it cleared, the lighter canvas went back to catch every wandering puff of the light airs.

Old Gus grew red-eyed and sleepy from overwork, for he was routed out, whatever the hour, when sails were altered. Gaunt from doing far more than his share of the work aloft and on deck, thirsting madly for the alcohol his aged body had learned to demand, the old sailor slogged on wearily. He no longer hurried anywhere, even when cursed and abused. He moved with the dogged determination that spoke of a staying power past all belief, but he conserved energy as much as possible. A wise old head aided a weakening back and weary arms.

Then came calm and the slatting to an under-running roll. Gear chafed aloft more than when drawing tight. Nerves frayed with the intense heat that baked their decks.

"Send the bo's'n aloft to check the gear," growled the disgruntled mate. "Keep his old nose to the job. Tell him to inspect everything and rig new chafing gear wherever necessary."

All day and day after day they lay there, one mate or the other always on duty under the awning, the crew idling for the most part, only old Gus clambering about aloft. The sun beat upon him mercilessly and his old limbs were chafed and raw in scores of places from jerking and slatting to the exaggerated pitch that the gentle roll gave the tall sticks without the steadying influence of a wind to fill the sails and hold her over. His lips blistered, cracked, and scabbed. Big fingers cracked and bled, to crack again. His feet ached from standing for hours with a footrope cutting into the arch.

Yet old Gus did his work faithfully and well. As he worked he sang in that cracked old voice, more noteworthy for its enthusiasm than its melody, the triumphant ditty he had adopted as his national anthem:

> Ten t'ousan' Svedes yoomped out of de veeds
> At the Battle of Copenhagen.

"'E ain't hooman," declared the Cockney. "'E's the bloody Ol' Man of the Sea they talks abaht. That's wot 'e is. 'E'll never die, not that one. 'E's a ghost that just comes to plague a ship."

"I t'ink he no Svede at all," declared a Dutchie fresh from a South African farm. "I t'ink he's dat Flyin' Dutchmans dey talk about at sea."

"In Rooshia ve feex," scowled a fiery Baltic tar. "No good—vork like dat. Bad for odder fellers. Ve keel for dat."

Then the water went stale in the casks under the heat of that sun. Gus drank it as a matter of course, having been accustomed to ropey water before. When a delegation, forming to go aft to demand fresh water, asked him to lead, Gus only grinned and shook his head.

"WHAT'S all this?" blustered Captain Engles, strutting forward with his chest expanded until he felt that he must be awing them with his fierceness.

"The drinkin' water's rotten," declared one of the men.

The skipper strode to the butt in his most Napoleonic manner and drew a little in the cup. With a quick lift he bit off enough to swallow and managed to get it down.

"Not bad, eh, bo's'n?" he chuckled. "You and me have swallowed a lot worse in our day, eh?" Then as old Gus grinned

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and nodded: "That's good for you, men. Better'n fresh water. The sickness bugs in it are all dead. No danger of catching anything from drinkin' that."

They still glowered at him.

"Hi think 'e bloody well better run for shore an' fresh water," the Cockney suggested in the ominous pause.

"Oh, do you?"

"Ve can' drink it. In Rooshia ve keel a man for make us dreenk sooch vater. Better ve go ashore und get good."

"Is that so? So you're runnin' this ship, are you? You're decidin' what we do, eh? Get the hell for'ard, the crazy lot of you, and drink what there is—and like it. I'm master aboard here and what I say goes."

But somebody broached all of the water casks during the night and there was nothing for it but to run in shore, find a stream, and fill again. Although the men had their way about getting sweet water, the skipper's wisdom in refusing was swiftly revealed to them. They fought all that night to wear ship as an on-shore breeze and an in-shore current swept them back and back toward the treacherous sandy beach they would otherwise have avoided by miles.

Furthermore, when they finally did win clear of the shore, the water proved to be full of germs. Men sickened and grew ghastly weak and wan. Their strength left them. They merely dragged themselves about or lay weltering in their bunks, too feeble to reach the deck.

Old Gus alone seemed immune. He cocked his head and grinned at Jameson, but not derisively. It was only that his old features were fixed in the expression dictated by a roguish nature.

"I fool dem yerms," he declared for the hundredth time. "I fool 'em goot. I pickle my inside vid vhiskey so no yerm goin' to live in me. Dat's de vay to live forever—soak your inside in vhiskey until dey can't rot und no yerm goin' to eat 'em."

Jameson, despairing at last of ever quenching that grin on the old Swede's face, gasped weakly and died. Four sailors followed his example. Captain Engles shook violently and took to his bed. Panic seized the survivors, except old Gus.

"Ve get a goot vind soon," he assured them, trotting about to nurse them, keeping one eye on the wind and the other on the sails. "She blow de yerms all ashore und ve go clean to London. De cap'n pull t'rough. Don' you worry about dat. He a tough ol' rooster lak' me. I see vorse t'ings dan dis aboart ship before."

"Hi'm for puttin' a boat over an' pullin' hashore," whined Cockney. "Hi've no desire for to die of them there shakes."

"Petter ve scuttle de ship und sink da bugs vid her," nodded Dutchie. "Ve take de sick vid us ve all get it."

"You talk like a pack of fools," snorted Gus. "You couldn' row a boat to shore, you lady sailors."

Old Gus went aft and into the cabin. The other mate was too sick to leave his bunk. Gus alone was left to carry on for the after-guard.

"Take care of my ship," pleaded Captain Engles, his hot claw on the thin old arm, his feverish eyes burning brightly as he stared. "Get her to England. She's all I've got."

"O' Goos is a sailor, cap'n," was his answer. "You don' got to worry about ol' Goos."

FINDING the wheel in beckets he staggered forward angrily, for he had left a man there to watch for changes of weather, to hold her up in case a puff of wind did come to fill the hanging sails. Then he paused at the forecastle door, warned by something ominous in that rumbling tone.

"I tell you vhat ve do," the Russian was insisting. "Vunce before I sail on sheep as sailor. Ve get wreck. Ev'ryt'ing los'. Nobody save noddin' excep' clothes he vear. Ve row ashore und get sent home on steamer. Plenty eats, no vork. Insurance pay ev'ryt'ing. Pay vages until ve founder, pay fare home, pay one hun'ert dollar for ev'ry man in de crew for dunnage. I fool dem insurance mans. I got no dunnage, but I get my hun'ert dollar joost lak'

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Scotch feller vhat got more dan hun'ert dollar vort' of gear."

"Hi s'y, is that the law?"

"I hear dat too," declared Dutchie. "A hun'ert dollar for each mans, no matter he lose somedings or no."

The Russian's voice sank, but old Gus caught the words.

"Mit de Ol' Man as goot as deat, de mates all gone—ve couldn't be expected to bring de sheep ashore, eh?"

Gus waited for no more. He went aft swiftly and silently. Without a word to the dozing skipper he went to the ornate chest and took out the Old Man's revolver. It took but a quick spin of the cylinder to assure him every chamber was loaded and in readiness. Stuffing the gun into his waistband and the box of shells into his pocket, he dragged himself to the deck.

He was just in time. The men were coming aft, led by Dutchie, Russia, and Cockney. They slowed at sight of him and blinked at the gun, looking uneasily at one another.

"We're chyngein' course," giggled Cockney. "Runnin' this bloody 'earse hashore. No use dyin' cooped up off 'ere."

"You changin' no course," the shaking old head declared solemnly.

"An' 'oo says so?"

"*Barker* says so," patting the gun with a horny old hand. "Barker is boss aboart dis packet. You yoost try to change dose course und see vhat Barker got to say." He giggled at their shuffling uneasiness. "He don' talk much but vhen he speak he holler lout."

The bluster changed to a wheedle. "But see 'ere, Gus. You stan' to make the same as we. A cool 'unerd dollars, that's twenty quid, the law'll allow us for our dunnage."

"An' twenty year for barratry and murder."

"Keel heem," hissed the Russian.

They inched forward, their eyes alight with fantastic determination. Suspense hung like a pall over the idling ship. Inch after inch they closed upon the lone old man with the worn old revolver.

"Dem smart lawyer ashore make monkey out of you," warned Gus. "Dey put you in yail. Tventy poun' not much goot in yail."

They came closer, snarling. Bloodshot eyes devoured him. Scrawny hands, thin with fever, clawed to get at his throat.

"Right dere you stop," declared Gus with harsh finality. "Cockney, you take de veel. De res' of you stan' back or I shoot."

They halted. The Russian urged them on, pushing at elbows near him, but keeping his own feet planted firmly. The gun came up and wavered at Cockney's breast.

"I got de right to shoot you deat," declared Gus solemnly. "De Ol' Man make me mate und put me in charge. Get goin', you Cockney."

THE steady glower of those red eyes, no longer grinning from their myriad wrinkles, sent the frightened Englishman in response to that waving gun. The movement broke the mutiny. The men returned forward, grumbling but submissive.

Then began a grim game between Gus and the men. The other mate had died and the captain was barely holding his own, thin and weak and wasted. It became a question of whether the captain would recover or the wind spring up before Gus fell asleep and the crew overpowered him. Lynx-like they waited and watched. Grimly old Gus fought to stay awake.

So sleepy that his weary old body ached in every joint, he managed to keep going through the heat with leaden eyelids drooping, with tired eyes growing redder and redder, with his befuddled old mind a daze. Often he bumped into something to startle himself awake. Frequently he fell, to shamble to his feet and wave off the human jackals that closed all too quickly.

But nature would not be denied. At last he sensed that he could no longer fight off oblivion. Fearful of being robbed of the one gun the ship carried, he locked himself in the mates' room, barricaded the

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door, and slept like a drugged man.

It may have been days later that he was awakened by an ugly shock. Blinking he sat up and tried to orient himself, aware only that he was on shipboard and that the vessel had struck. Then he started to tear away the barricade.

"Gus," wailed the captain, "save my ship. Don't let them wreck her."

He threw back the bolts and staggered past the sick man. With a reassuring grin he made for the deck. His head went back. Old cords tightened on the leathery neck. His voice thundered.

Ten t'ousan' Svedes yoomped out of de veeds
At t'e Battle of Copenhagen.

Dey fell in line, begun to whine
In a minute d'e was schlagen.

Den d'e fallen hosts rose up like ghosts
And dey slaughtered all d'e morgen.

Oh, d'e Svedes dey felled d'e Danes like reeds
At t'e Battle of Copenhagen.

The legendary recipients of that ancient Swedish attack could have been no more taken by surprise than the mutineers. They halted their mad rush to lower the boat they had already started overside. Like guilty children they stared at the weaving old sailor and his gun.

Gus surveyed them and the distant shore, the sails, filled now with a gentle breeze, the sandy bottom visible through the green water overside. For a long minute nobody spoke.

"There's a bloody storm in the mykin'," ventured Cockney at last. "We're for gettin' ashore afore hit 'its us. We'll tyke you an' the skipper along, eh?"

The sea lifted the old *Boma* and dropped her with a grinding of sand hard on the bar. The captain's wail echoed up from the cabin. "Save my ship, Gus. Don't let them wreck her."

"You make youself a lot o' vork," grinned Gus, studying the situation. "She easier to roon agroun' dan it is to vork a ship off. You learn dat too—you smart fellers, you."

He gave orders swiftly, his voice harsh, his gestures punctuated by a wave of that gun.

They obeyed sullenly, red eyes of hate boring at him. It was true that the wind and sea were rising. If the *Boma* was not to be sacrificed to the sand and the storm, she must be pulled off at once.

Old Gus scratched his thin thatch and studied swiftly. In order to save the ship, he knew he must run an anchor off the stern far enough to kedge the hull free. It would have been a simple matter under ordinary circumstances, but now it presented difficulties. With a rifle he could easily have commanded that boat's crew from the stern of the bark, but he could not be sure the revolver would hold them loyal. Neither could he desert the ship and expect the ruffians left aboard to refrain from cutting the cable, when they understood what he was doing.

Suddenly he stepped forward, grinning. The men had brought a grindstone to the deck and had sharpened axes and knives in preparation for possible trouble ashore. Seizing one of the axes he whirled the blade down into the dry wood of the boat still lying bottom-up on the housing.

"I t'ink you don' get ashore in dat," he grinned. "Now ve rig a kedge and Old Gus show you some more sailor vork."

THEY worked with sullen rage, watching him every instant, trying to edge near enough to leap at him. But Gus only grinned and waved them back to their work and occasionally threw back his head to howl his defiance in his mad old song. The sound boat was lowered and hauled forward. The port anchor was put aboard, with a cable snaking aft from the capstan to its ring. Old Gus put a leg over the rail to descend to the boat, then he turned and faced the men on deck.

"Don't forget I come back an' ve vork her free," he reminded them. "Anybody

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make trouble I shoot him deat."

Even as he went down the side an axe flashed. One siderope was slashed and the ladder swayed, but Gus leaped for the dancing boat before it could pull away and covered the wielder of the axe.

"T'row dat avay," he screamed. "Remember dis de on'y boat lef'. If ve don't get you off you drown vhen de ship break up."

That seemed to cow them. His men rowed sullenly in response to his gun. He had intentionally picked the less mischievous of the crew. They dropped the heavy anchor and started to return.

Again an axe flashed aloft. The echo of its clang went across the water to the boat as it came down again and again on steel plates. Then the cable, severed by those mad strokes, slid into the water with a plop.

For one black minute old Gus knew despair. The sea was rising steadily. The old ship was grinding and groaning on the sand, lifted and rocked deeper by every successive wave. Alone he could not hope to be in two places at once. Then he saw a dangling white thing thrusting slowly from the wide port under the stern and his hopes lifted. Captain Engles, sick as he was, understood and was offering him a safe way to board.

"Pull," he called to the men, sweeping the steering oar over to alter their course and send them under the overhang of that clipper stern. "Got her fast inside, cap'n?"

Then, in response to that feeble assurance from within, he turned to his men. "There's wild bush-niggers in dem voods," he lied, nodding toward the shore. "Head-hunter devils, vhat eat you qvick as dey look at you. If you don' vant to stew in deir kittle, you better stan' by."

Then he was under the stern, had reached the improvised rope of sheets, and was swinging up like a monkey, the revolver tucked in his belt.

But Captain Engles had used up his last reserve of strength in that feeble effort. Gus was still alone in his fight to get the ship clear.

But Gus needed no urging to do his duty. To him it would have been unthinkable to let the ship founder. Ships were the gods in the cosmos of old Gus. He had slaved on them and he had cursed them, but, like any seaman, to him a ship—no matter how poor—was a thing of dignity. In Old Gus there was a sort of nautical honor that pledged him to get the *Boma* off the bar, or die trying.

Again he went grimly up those stairs, reinforced this time by a swig of alcohol from the medicine chest. Shaking his head he emerged on deck to dodge an expertly flung axe and put an answering bullet into the arm of the Russian, who had thrown it.

In his hurry to get the kedge anchor out, he had not taken time to throw the bailer into the boat. Dry from lying on the deck in that tropic heat, even under the protection of the tarpaulin stretched over it, the boat had leaked at a dozen seams. Low in the water now, it had been too unwieldy for the men at the oars to attempt a dash for shore, even if they had dared risk the old sailor's rage.

Again Gus gave orders. The bailer was tossed down and more than half of the water was removed. Then he bade them halt proceedings and come up, bringing the bailer, leaving their oars.

Swiftly he named off the worst men in the crew, the ringleaders of the mutiny movement. They exchanged sly grins and tumbled swiftly down the ladder. With Gus holding the gun on them, they took the starboard anchor and waited for the cable to be securely fastened to the ring.

"We'll be bloody well out o' range o' 'is popgun," whispered Cockney. "We'll drop the bloody 'ook and myke for shore, bein' careful to untie 'is 'itch."

Old Gus grinned down at him, watching the water swirling up through the cracks, pushed faster by the weight of that heavy anchor. Sharks cut the water about the boat, their fins black triangles above slatey long bodies. He held the bailer in his hand, aware that it was the key to the situation.

"Before you unfasten dat line, Cock-

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ney," he grinned, watching the water rising in the boat and the sharks circling outside, "you better figure how you goin' git ashore before dat boat fill—und feed you to de shark."

They were licked, at least for the moment, and they knew it. Not a man in that boat had anything with which to bail that rising tide.

"We'll dump 'er," growled Cockney, "an' we'll bloody well sojer when we gets aboard. We'll myke out she won't start. We'll pass the word abaht and nobody'll waste no strength 'eavin', wot?"

They nodded grimly. Once they were all aboard that boat they could easily take care of Gus. At close quarters his gun would avail him nothing. As he came down the ladder an oar might crack his skull, or a quick heel in the chops might spill him to the waiting sharks. Oh, there were still a dozen ways to rid themselves of him.

BUT the rising tide inside their boat would not allow too long a delay or the boat might easily capsize when they tried to drop the anchor over. Furthermore, pulling for shore, once that anchor was gone, would constitute mutiny—if the ship got clear or some vessel passed near enough to take off the survivors before she broke up. They returned grudgingly.

Old Gus read their attitude aright, waved them aboard.

"Now ve sail dis ship home," he called cheerfully. "Tally on to de capstan an' valk her off."

He had trimmed the yards and got everything in readiness. Now he watched suspiciously as the men pretended to strain and heave. So much man power, applied in earnest, must have either dragged that anchor through the sandy bottom or hauled the ship away. Instead nothing happened. The cable straightened but did not sing with the strain.

"Ve can' pull no more. Ve tuckered out," gasped Dutchie.

"Valk her off," roared Gus. "Valk her arount, boys. Heave her home to Englan'."

Still they seemed unable to budge ship or anchor. A big wave came toward them, lifted the stern, started forward.

"Now," screamed Gus. "Let her have it."

Faces strained. Backs and arms and legs tensed. Grunting and gasping filled the air.

"Ve can't do it," wailed Dutchie. "Better ve get ashore before de storm break."

"You'll jolly well be the death of hus all with your bloody slave-drivin'," sniveled Cockney in mock terror. "Tyke us hashore."

Old Gus looked down at that thrumming line as wave after wave swept toward them, sloshed under the poop, went creaming past. There was no question that the sea was rising. There was no doubt that the old bark, heavily laden as she was, must batter to pieces or sink to an ignominious grave in those sands unless she wear free somehow and soon. But what could he do?

He followed that cable with his eyes. It was angled correctly, should haul them free. Then a great roar of anger burst from him, as he caught sight of a kink in the steel and knew that he was being fooled. A single man, aided by the leverage of the capstan bar, could pull the kinks out of a cable if he put his weight to the job. His crew was soldiering, pretending to heave but really idling.

With a mighty roar he swept at them, his gun threatening.

"Tyke us ashore in the boat, Gussie. Don't let us drown 'ere."

The wail inspired him, gave him the necessary suggestion. With a whirl he tucked the revolver in his trouser top, lifted the heavy grindstone, swung it over his head.

"He's gone daft," screamed Cockney. "Run for your bloody lives."

But Gus had not gone daft. A clear ray of reason had broken through his doubts. Still holding the stone aloft he staggered to the rail, cast one anxious look below in quest of the boat, heaved the big stone from him.

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Down, down it flashed, to land with a crashing swish in the partially filled boat, to shatter the light planking, to admit a gushing stream instead of the slow seepage. Horrified the crew watched from the rail, aware that he had ruined their one chance of getting ashore.

"Now you vork," he bellowed at them.

But they had crept nearer under cover of the rail. During that half minute while he watched the boat fill and lurch downward, to spill the stone over and then ride, a hopelessly shattered wreck, at the end of the painter, they had charged. Old Gus went down under a flailing barrage of boots and fists, his aching old body battered and bruised and bleeding as the avengers swarmed over him.

FOR a second he was submerged. Then he lifted, bleeding but still fighting. Far aft, hauling himself along by a feeble grip on the housing, was the emaciated figure of the sick skipper. At sight of him Gus gave a mighty bellow of defiance and shook his captors almost free.

Captain Engles screamed in a voice cracked with age and fever but still accustomed to command, "Stand back, you murderin' devils. Leave that man alone."

They halted by sheer instinct, being creatures beaten into submission. Before they could snarl and return to their combat, the old voice went on. "Don't you know what you're doin', you fools? He's the only man aboard that can save you. The mates are dead and I'm sick."

He started to slide, even as he spoke, went sprawling weakly to the deck and lay there, gasping, moaning piteously with the wail of an old man too weak to help himself. "Save my ship. Don't let her sink. Save her for me. She's all I've got. Get us back to England."

"He's right, ve got to vork de ship free or ve all die," called Gus. "I take de veel. You yump on dem capstan bars und gif' her all you got. Ve got to float her."

The capstan went around and around. With blanched faces the erstwhile mutineers heaved and strained. The cable lifted, grew taut, thrummed with the heave of every passing wave.

Again the old ship lifted. Again they went around and around, only to feel her strike down. Another wave and another lift. Another spin of floundering bodies and straining backs and failing legs. Another mad roar from the crazy old Swede aft at the wheel.

Around and around and around. Lift and hesitate and then crash. A shudder of trembling timber, another lift, another mad heave at those bars.

"She mus' be draggin'," gasped Dutchie.

"Somethin' givin' you're bloody well raht."

Then there came another heave and another lift, the sickening wait while the old bark swanked down. They waited, breathless and incredulous, but that smashing drop of the old bow did not end with a grinding smack on hard sand. Instead she merely knifed into green water as the cable suddenly slacked.

They continued to heave until the anchor was under the stern. Then old Gus ordered them to cut and the old *Boma* heeled hard over to scud safely past the end of that cheated bar and into open Atlantic.

Old Gus picked up the skipper tenderly and started aft with him, after setting the course. He turned and grinned back at the men.

"I t'ink ve blow to England now vidout no more trouble," he called cheerfully. "I t'ink you fellers been crazy vid de heat. I goin' to svear to de Ol' Man he been out of his head und dream it all. You goin' to back me up?"

They answered with a cheer. Later, when he heaved to the deck, his old head thrown back, his vocal cords straining, that cracked old voice was somehow changed into sweet music to them.

Ten t'ousan' Svedes, dey sail vid speed
Right back to Copenhagen.

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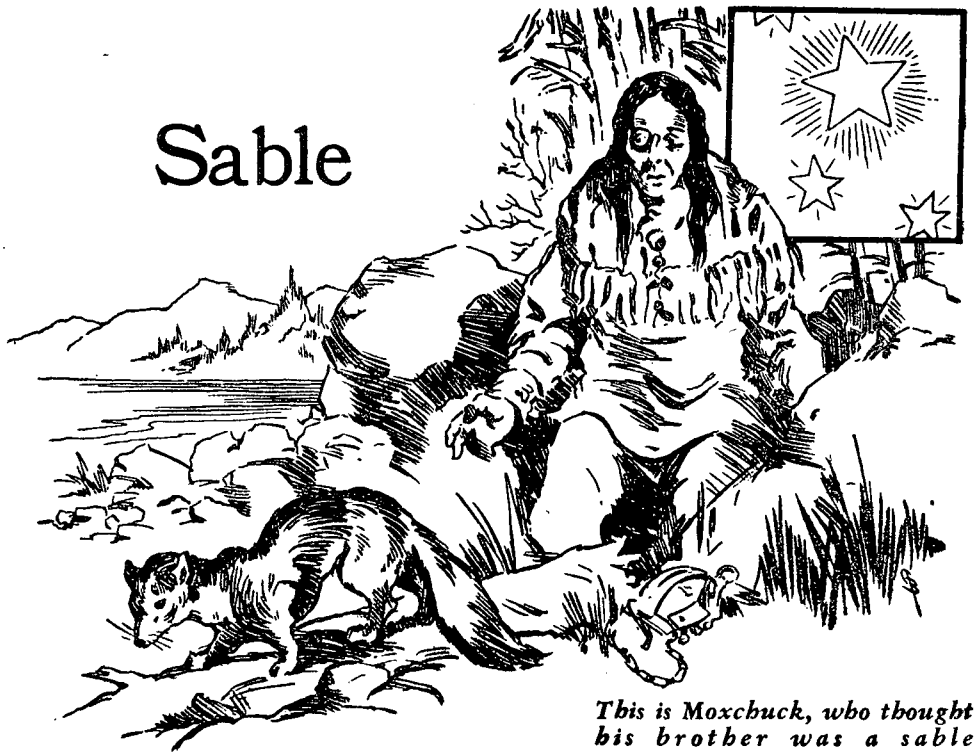
Sable



This is Moxchuck, who thought his brother was a sable

By FRANK R. PIERCE

SERGE KUPOFF was admittedly the greatest director in Hollywood. Ask anybody. Ask—if you want to get the most emphatic answer—Kupoff. His assignment to direct *Frozen Courage* for Super-Art gives him a dandy chance to work out his pet theory, to the effect that modern men and women, turned loose in the wilderness and subjected to emotional pressure, will revert to the primitive. Serge, as can be guessed, is a little "teched in the haid."

For his *Frozen Courage* cast, he chooses two non-professionals, sons of the North with a grudge between them that should satisfy even Kupoff's idea of "unleashed emotions"—Hawk Dow and Wolverine Bullock. Just to make things a little more unleashed, as it were, he forces the leading lady, young Rita Terry, to play up to both men. She falls in love with Hawk.

Wolverine Bullock accepts the job because his idea of a real sinecure is to kill Hawk Dow with his fists—and get paid for it. Hawk signs up because the location trip to Alaska would take him to Sable Valley, a desolate and supposedly forbidden region which, years before, a Russian explorer had stocked with genuine Siberian sable. No-Shirt McGee went along because he was more or less an expert on the Alaskan terrain—and because he wanted to prevent, if he could, Hawk Dow from getting himself killed off.

ON THE trip, the primitive emotions boil merrily. Jealousies and spites take flame at an appalling rate. To make matters worse, Wolverine Bullock somehow finds out about Sable Valley, and determines to cheat Hawk out of the pelts.

He has a group of ruffians friendly to him join the party as it proceeds toward the interior, and between Kupoff and his ideas, and Wolverine and his associates and their ruthless greed, things look sort of tough for Hawk and Rita and No-Shirt.

They find Sable Valley and cross over to it by means of a not-very-secure snow bridge. As they are preparing to film the first shots against the natural backgrounds,

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there is a crash. The snowbridge melts into nothingness. Somebody whose emotions are just a shade too unleashed has blown up the bridge and marooned the party in ultra-primitive Sable Valley.

CHAPTER VI

CASUALTY THE FIRST

THE cameraman rushes up at that moment and points at the crevasse, "My God!" he screams, "we're trapped here. We may have to wait years before there's enough snowfall to bridge over that crack." He caught Kupoff's arm. "Do you know what it means?" he says in a hysterical voice, "fight for life, survival of the fit and maybe . . ."

Kupoff's face showed nothin'. "You have an active imagination," is all he says.

The cameraman walks off, and the fingers holdin' his cigarette are shakin'. I'm checkin' over the supplies in my head and balancin' them with the number of mouths. Of the motion picture company there's Kupoff, the cameraman, Rita Terry and a Indian packer named Moxchuck Jim. There's Hawk Dow and me, then Wolverine Bullock and five men. There'd have been nine, but four of 'em are in the crevasse. Twelve mouths to feed, and grub enough to last four weeks. I find myself doin' a little multiplyin'. If there's enough grub to feed twelve people four weeks, there's enough to feed *one* person a year.

Every one of the twelve is prob'ly thinkin' that, except Rita. She's thinkin' of Hawk, like as not, and wonderin' what's goin' to happen to him. Women in love usually thinks of theirselves last.

"It was a very fortunate accident for you," Kupoff tells Bullock when he comes up. "Four men who hated you are dead."

"They didn't hate me—" Bullock answered, "—yet. They was suspicious."

Others crowded around, starin' at the crevasse. Rita and Hawk hurries up and Hawk looks at me with questionin' eyes. I keeps my mouth shut about the powder. I'll tell him that later, in private.

"We've one chance to get through this alive," the cameraman says in a hysterical voice, "and that is to elect the strongest man among us to dictate a course of action. He'll have charge of all food; and all of us will agree to obey his orders. I nominate Hawk Dow. I *know* men. He's the strongest . . ."

"Like hell!" Bullock sneered. "He's weak, soft-hearted and a fool. He saved my life in the white water. He saved it knowing I hate him. Only a weak fool would've done that."

The cameraman figgers we're back to the Ice Age and there's somethin' in what Bullock says. He turns to Kupoff. "What do you think, Serge?"

Kupoff doesn't answer. He's on the sidelines, watchin' the play of emotions among humans who suddenly are thinkin' every other human is odds against their gettin' out alive.

"There's the river," one of the Bullock men says. He's a big brute named Crimp Morten. "A strong man could cross it and get over the mountains to Indian Bay."

"Dictators elect theirselves," Bullock said suddenly. He's got a automatic pistol in his hand. "I've just been elected."

THERE'S a hum and I can see Kupoff, smilin' as though he expected this would happen. He's crankin' the camera.

"That's all wrong," the cameraman protests, "you're assumin' power we didn't give you. You . . ." The automatic cracks flatly and a bullet kicks up the ice near the cameraman's feet. He howls, but he ain't touched. It'd been funny, except what it stood for. Bullock, who leans on brute strength more'n intelligence, has the upper hand.

"Open up the packs," he tells the cameraman.

We'd worked hard packin' grub over slippery ice. Each pound counted and none of us was carryin' extra weight in the way of guns, except Bullock. There's quite an assortment of gats when the cameraman is through openin' packs. "Save the forty-five ammunition," Bullock says, "throw the guns into the crevasse."

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"We should've elected Hawk," the cameraman protests, "this ain't orderly."

Bullock scowls and is about to say somethin' when Crimp Morten says, "I'm goin' to try for the river. I can make it through."

"Everybody step into river, die," Moxchuck Jim grunts. "All Indian know that. Russian *shaman* put longtime curse on river." By Russian *shaman* he meant medicine man.

"You'll do as I say, all of you," Bullock yells. "Now pack the rest of this stuff down into the valley. We'll make a camp in that timber thicket near the river."

It's the river me and Hawk call Sable after the valley—the one Moxchuck says is cursed. I can see he don't like the idear of campin' there none.

Hawk Dow swings a hundred-and-twenty pound pack on his shoulders and starts off. Rita gives him a queer look. "I didn't think he'd submit like an ox," she says to me.

"He ain't," I answers. "And you'd be the first to stop him if he tried to go up against Bullock's automatic bare-handed."

"I know! I know!" she says wearily. "But it was the hang-dog expression in his eyes as he meekly obeyed."

"If he fooled you, Rita," I says, chucklin', "then he's fooled Bullock. You must remember even dictators have to sleep, and when they sleep they have to be guarded, because, chances are, their enemies ain't sleepin'. Well, Bullock ain't picked his guard yet."

Bullock went seventy-two hours without sleep while he drove the rest of us into makin' camp. Next he orders a trapper among his five survivin' men to lay out a trap-line. This job finished, he looks over the rest of us. His eyes are bloodshot and he's in a mean mood.

Kupoff starts takin' a close-up of him and he bellows, "Stop that blasted camera or I'll put a bullet through the lens." The camera stops, but not before it caught Bullock's face as he bellows.

About the time the rest of us figgers to call it a day Bullock motions one of his men and says, "You want to live don't you?"

"Who don't?" the man answers.

"Now listen," Bullock says. "I can't catch his words, but it's plain he's tellin' the cuss if he guards him, he'll be one of the two survivors if it gets down to that.

I don't like him at all. He's got watery eyes and plasters his straight hair down on his head. He looks like a muskrat that's come to the surface of a pond to take a look around. I walks over to Hawk Dow. "He's picked the Muskrat for guard," I says.

"That's all wrong," the cameraman protests, "we should've elected Hawk to take command. I move he be elected commander right now, and a committee be appointed to reason with Bullock."

IT'S funny how character shows up at a time like this. Each man to his own methods. The cameraman believes in government by election. But big Crimp Morten figgers his only chance lays in swimmin' the river. He's leanin' on his own brute strength and to hell with the rest of us. Moxchuck Jim is already licked. He believes in curses and feels he's helpless. He huddles in thickets and stares with glitterin' eyes.

Nobody seconds the cameraman's motion. You can't *reason* with a man who figgers his own life depends on his holdin' the upper hand.

Long before I drop off to sleep I can hear Bullock's heavy snores. He's picked a spot pretty well surrounded by rocks, and the Muskrat is perched on a boulder. Bullock didn't give him his gun. His job's to wake the dictator up if anything looks suspicious.

Thousands of birds singin' wakes us at daybreak. "Everybody out," Bullock roars. He sets on his perch, rollin' a cigarette, and I can see he's slept so hard he's got a headache. The cameraman don't stir and Hawk reaches over and grabs his foot, then he turns back the top of the sleepin' bag.

"Good gosh!" I exclaims, "he's dead!"

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Somebody's crushed his skull with a rock. "Primitive weapons," Kupoff says without emotion. "And, I might add, the fate a man risks who carries the torch of revolt."

"Did you hear any sound during the night?" Bullock asks the Muskrat.

"Not a thing, but then the glaciers are makin' so much noise," the Muskrat answers, "a man misses lots of sounds."

CHAPTER VII

ONE LESS MOUTH

EVERYONE stands around lookin' at the cameraman's remains and wonderin' who done it. My guess would be Bullock only he couldn't have come down without the Muskrat seein' him. And if the Muskrat had any guilty knowledge his face would've showed it.

"One less mouth to feed," Kupoff says and the tone in his voice rasps everybody's nerves. "Twenty-five days' food for twelve people figures nine hundred meals. We can now divide nine hundred by eleven instead of twelve."

"You dirty rat," Hawk says in a low voice, but his eyes are blazing. "Putting murder into people's hearts."

"It is what we are all thinking," Kupoff answers, "why not admit it? This is elemental."

"Who's missing?" Rita asks suddenly. "There's only ten of us here."

It's Crimp Morten. We scatter, looking around, half expecting to stumble onto Crimp's body. Hawk Dow finds his tracks first. They lead straight to the river, and they ain't the tracks of a man runnin' from a crime he's committed. You can tell by the prints in the wet sand he's walkin' slow, and thinkin' hard as he walks. "One thing is certain," Hawk says, "Crimp never killed the cameraman. In the first place, why should he?"

We follows the tracks along the stream nearly a mile, then of a sudden they end. Rita has a pair of binoculars. She studies the opposite bank, but there ain't no tracks comin' out of the water.

There's a bar downstream and we all race to it, with Bullock and his automatic bringin' up the rear. A half mile beyond the bar the river goes into a fissure in the ridge that stands between it and the Inland Passage water beyond. This bar is covered with stranded boulders and fragments of ice.

Moxchuck Jim's eyes pick up somethin' the rest of us hadn't seen—somethin' like a bag shot full of sand. He muttered somethin' under his breath and his eyes were crazy with superstition. I heard him say somethin' about the curse of the Russian *shaman* then I steps closer. The *bag* is what's left of Crimp Morten.

Hawk Dow drags the remains to a pool and sluices off the sand. I give him a hand and while we're at it, there's a change in the air. Somethin's different. The glaciers roar just the same, but there's an undertone, and a feelin' like the rock under us is hollow and trains are runnin' through a tunnel.

"You claim there is a practical answer to every legend," Kupoff says to Hawk. "Explain this one. The man attempts to cross the forbidden stream and is destroyed. He has been terribly beaten. There's hardly an unbroken bone in his body."

Hawk doesn't answer. He is tryin' to figure it out. Kupoff shrugs his shoulders. "Nine hundred meals to be divided among ten of us now," he says, "the death of two men has extended the food supply of the survivors five days."

"Damn you, Kupoff!" Hawk shouts. His hands clench and he starts for the director. "Keep your ghoulish arithmetic to yourself."

We pack Crimp's remains to a wooded knoll and somebody runs back to camp for the shovel. Four others lug the cameraman's body down to the knoll and Hawk says what he can remember of the funeral service over the two graves. The thunder of the ice makes us think of organ notes in a church and we're all pretty solemn. You can't help but be when you know somebody may be doin' the same thing

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for you in another twenty-four hours.

But even now I catches a familiar sound —Kupoff's filmin' the scene.

THE rest of the day is plain, unvarnished hell. There's a killer in our midst and nobody knows who it is. I edges over to Hawk Dow that evenin' and asks, "Got any idear who killed the cameraman? It's queer he'd die right after pluggin' for an election that'd change the present set-up."

"I haven't any yardstick to go by," he answers, puzzled, "My experience in Alaska and other frontiers doesn't help a bit. There's never been anything like this before. A group of civilized people—more or less—are set down in a piece of the ice age world the march of time left behind. That's enough to throw everything off balance."

"It sure is," I agrees.

"But on top of that," he continues, "we have a half-mad movie director who is using us as guinea pigs for his blasted experiments in human reactions. I catch myself dividing the number of meals left by the number of people. I'm going nuts if this keeps up. Damn Kupoff." He stares intently at the fire.

"I've sorta expected somebody would take a chance and get the jump on Bullock," I says. "His own men are afraid of him. I thought one of them might try it."

"Not a chance," he answers. "And here's why. They reason I'll make the break sooner or later. If I kill Bullock they know I won't murder them in cold blood. They'll come to terms and be tickled to death to get away with their lives. On the other hand if they attempt to jump him they may be killed."

"I guess you're right," I admits, "a man would be a fool to take a chance when somebody else will do it for him. You're their best bet, but when are you goin' to make the move?"

"Whenever I've figured everything out," Hawk answers, "and not before. If I get the chance I'll jump him. If he forces my hand I'll do the best I can by myself. But I'm not going into it unprepared or be tricked into anything if I can help it. I know it's a strain on everybody. But don't forget, Bullock's feelin' the strain, too."

Rita listens to everything he says. Sometimes she nods in agreement, but mostly she's nervous and can't sit still. Suddenly she jumps up. "Where're you going?" Hawk asks her.

"To take a walk," she answers. "For the first time in my life I feel as if I were going to pieces. I've got to get my nerve back."

I get a sudden feelin' Bullock may be goin' to force Hawk's hand right then and there, as Kupoff suddenly starts to follow the girl. Bullock's settin' on the ledge with his back to the rock wall. "Come back here, Kupoff," he orders. "The rest of you quit gettin' together. I know what you're talkin' about. After this when I catch two or more plottin' again' me I'll shoot first and ask questions afterward."

He jumps off his perch and starts through the twilight after Rita. "You stay here, Hawk," I says, "I'm goin' to trail that buzzard. He's just lookin' for a chance to shoot you."

"How about you?" Hawk asks.

"I've had a lot of fun in my life, and most of that life is behind me," I says. "When you get my age, it's funny that livin' don't seem so important. You want to live, you understand, Hawk, but if your number should be up, you don't worry a lot."

"How long have you been feeling this way?" Hawk asks. "Just since we came here."

"Heck no," I answers. "I guess I commenced to feel that nothin' much mattered when I quit crossin' the street for a closer look at a pretty girl."

While he chews on that I follows. The Muskrat is all set to trail me when Hawk stops him. "I've been wantin' to talk to you a long time," I hears him say. "Don't think the goddess of luck has turned her light on you and that you're to be spared while better men die. Bullock picked you because you're the only man in the bunch

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that hasn't nerve enough to jump him at the first opportunity. He's probably counting every meal you eat right now, and thinking each meal is one he could use later on."

"Don't talk like that!" the Muskrat whimpers. I takes a squint at Kupoff. His lips are bared in a mirthless smile and his teeth don't even look human, gleamin' there in the fire light.

RITA'S settin' on a stranded log several hundred yards from camp, watchin' the river and tryin' to get her nerve back. While I'm watchin', Wolverine Bullock comes out of the brush and joins her. I sneaks through that same brush and worms my way to within twenty feet of 'em.

"Whose woman are you?" Bullock demands in a sullen voice. "Kupoff claims you made Hawk love you, but you're really his woman. What's the truth? And if you lie, damned if I don't throttle you right here."

She lifts her eyes calmly. Her nerves may be shot, but there ain't nothin' wrong with that girl's courage. "I come from a line of troupers," she answers, "and the instinct to think only of the show is pretty strong. Kupoff harped on it. He wanted to stir something in Hawk and thought I might help. Well, I fell in love. That's all there is to it now. I love Hawk Dow."

"Blast you," Bullock says, "I believe you're tellin' the truth. But I also figger you've got horse sense."

"What do you mean?" she asks.

"Other things been the same, with nothin' to prevent, you'd marry Hawk and be happy," he explains, speakin' slow as he has trouble findin' just the words he wants. "But things ain't the same. As Kupoff says, it's like we're livin' ten thousand years ago—and things was plenty different then."

"Love hasn't changed in ten thousand years," she says, real quiet.

"It's changed plenty," he answers. "Nowadays two people meet, love, and then pair off. In them days a girl first picked herself a man who was strong and could hunt. Then, as now, she was thinkin' about them three square meals a day. He picked a girl who could cook, make clothes and take care of the meat and furs he brought in. They paired off and love came afterward."

"And all this means just what?"

"That I'm the best bet," he says bluntly. "You're goin' to forget your love for Hawk. You're going to think about bein' young and wantin' to live. And you're goin' to throw in with the man holdin' the cards. I'm goin' to have the only girl in the valley. That's what it means."

She is silent a long time, then says, "You talk as if you were confident we could eventually escape?" It's a question and Bullock knows it.

"We can escape in time," he answers, "but it won't be over any snow bridges, nor any bridges we can build across this river or crevasses on Blue Glacier. We haven't timber long enough to make the spans, nor the equipment to build 'em if we did have. But I'm goin' to get out of this alive."

"And what are you going to live on until the day of escape arrives?" she asks.

"I've got that figgered out too," he answers. "Think it over and let me know how you feel." He stands over her several seconds and twice his hands go out as if to possess her against the ice age world of eight other people. Then he figgers a waitin' game is better and steps back. I squirms back into the brush before he stumbles over me when he goes back to camp. And I know this, whatever Bullock's got figgered out, Rita plays a big part. His mind's all made up. If Rita don't listen to what he thinks is the logic in his talk, then she's goin' to listen to force.

EVERYBODY wakes up the next mornin' and gives a quick look around to see if anybody's dead. If the rest put in as nervous a night as I did, a killer wouldn't have had a chance of committin' a crime without bein' seen.

"Everybody but Rita is goin' to run

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the trap-lines today," Bullock announces. "She's goin' to stay here and work in camp. When her work's done she can set down and do a little thinkin'." Then he gives her a significant look and I can see Hawk Dow clench his fists. He knowed what Bullock was drivin' at because I'd told him what I'd heard.

Runnin' a trap-line is right down my street and I figgered a day away from camp would make me feel better. I was gettin' tired of bein' one of Kupoff's guinea pigs. "Come on," I says to Hawk.

Bullock shakes his head. "No," he says, "I don't want you fellers together. You speak the same language."

I strikes out alone and I'm the first back. Nobody's in camp but Rita and she's workin' away on a bang-up meal. There's voices that drift through the brush when the roar of the glaciers ain't so loud, and that's a hint for me to investigate. Sure enough there's Kupoff and he's talkin' to the Muskrat and Moxchuck Jim.

Kupoff's havin' the time of his life, playin' on the Indian's superstitions and the white man's love of life. "Figure out the number of meals," he is sayin' to the Muskrat, "and divide by the number of mouths, and you have the answer. The less mouths the longer you'll live." Then he turns to Moxchuck. "What was it you were saying about your dead brother?"

Moxchuck Jim's got plenty of Eskimo blood in him and he believes when a man dies there is a new star in the sky if the man has led a good life. Otherwise his spirit may go into some animal's body.

"Lay off Moxchuck," I says, "can't you see he's scared stiff?"

"A rather interesting experiment with the primitive mind," Kupoff answers. "Its response to the power of suggestion amazes me. He has the idea his brother's soul is now in an animal. He has been waiting for a dream to reveal the breed of animal. He thinks perhaps it is a polar bear or possibly a walrus. There's a disgrace that must be wiped out before this soul can go on and become one of the new stars in the heavens. I suggested perhaps the soul was now in one of the sable and his brother is very close to him. The fellow was almost frightened to death. He refuses absolutely to go near a sable."

That didn't surprise me none, because lots of Eskimos won't go near a woman during confinement. They believe they'll die and they do die. But it's because of fear. The fear kills 'em.

One of the men came along just then with a couple of sable he'd taken from a trap. Moxchuck lets out a yell and disappears. "There was one shot you didn't get with your blasted camera," I says.

"I'll get a better one," Kupoff predicts. But when the better shot came, the director didn't get it.

WE works pretty late that night skinnin' and saltin' the sable pelts. Us trappers almost forgot we was prisoners in a Ice-Age valley as we handled them pelts. Crown fur, every one of 'em. I figgered they mightn't be prime, but it was so cold where they'd set the traps, the fur was in good shape.

"What'll Kupoff think of next?" I asks Hawk when I got a chance after we'd turned in. Then I tells him what I'd heard.

"I don't know," Hawk answers. "If Moxchuck has some dream and gets the idea his brother tells him to kill one of us, he'll do it. No-Shirt, I haven't let up, night or day, trying to figure a safe way to escape. There's no sense in jumping Bullock until we have the escape angle figured out. The river's the answer. I thought of a raft, but it would go to pieces before we got halfway across. I thought of swimming."

"It would fill your clothes with sand," I says, "and you'd drown. If you try it naked, you'll die of exposure on the other side. I was lookin' it over yesterday."

"Did you hear subway trains running under your feet?" he asks.

"I didn't hear 'em," I answers, "but I could feel the vibration. What's the answer to that?"

"I don't know," he admits, "but . . ."

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A blood-chillin' scream knocks everything out of my head. Rita Terry almost jumps out of her sleepin'-bag and the Muskrat settin' near Bullock yells a warnin'. Bullock jumps up, gun in hand, wavin' it back and forth coverin' all of us.

Hawk grabs Moxchuck's arm and says, "Wake up, Jim! Wake up, you're having a bad dream."

"What's the matter with the idiot?" Bullock growls.

"Sable talk," Moxchuck says in dialect. "My brother sable. He says me kill 'em evil eye!"

"Who's got an evil eye?" Hawk asks, tryin' to calm the native.

Moxchuck just shakes and mutters somethin' neither of us can understand. He finally goes back to sleep, but there's no sleep for the rest of us until after midnight.

When we wake up late the next morning Moxchuck's gone. "No-Shirt," Bullock says, "you're the best tracker in the bunch, find that Indian." His eyes kinda narrow. "And don't fall down on the job."

He's nervous, I sees that right off the bat. Moxchuck's kind moves like shadows. They can ease a knife between a man's ribs and disappear like a puff of smoke. And they won't make any more noise, either.

I puts in a day and never finds a sign. Bullock don't like it none and after supper he talks it over with the Muskrat and gives him plenty to worry about. A rain's blowin' up and it looks like a swell night for a murder.

Bullock puts in his time, when he's through with the Muskrat goin' over the sable pelts. He tosses one here, and another there and pretty soon it's plain he's matchin' 'em up. He get's twenty-five laid out then calls Rita. "They're yours," he says. "Put 'em away somewheres."

"Lovely!" she exclaims. Even I'm stirred by the sight so you can figger what them pelts does to a girl. "I wonder if I'll ever wear 'em?" she muses.

"Damned right you'll wear 'em," he says heavily, "and I'll be with you."

"Ah," Kupoff says, "this is priceless. It proves many things. Emotions change but little in ten thousand years and the appetites of females, not at all. Ten thousand years ago a woman was saying, 'Lovely!' when a man gave her fur from some creature." He looked curiously at Hawk Dow, then says, "And another man crouched in the shadows, defeated and glowering."

"Easy, Hawk," I warns, "he's never yet brought about the fight to the death between you two, don't let him trick you into it until you're ready."

Hawk relaxes. But instead of settin' close to Rita when we gathers around the camp fire, he prowls about in the shadows alone. And Bullock sets by Rita.

•

WE'RE all nervous about Moxchuck, and while the Muskrat guards Bullock as he sleeps, me and Hawk take turns guardin' the others against Moxchuck. Nobody's dead when we turns out the next morning and Bullock orders us to run the trap-lines again. Before we're really started the Muskrat yells he's got a big sable in a trap.

"Wait!" Kupoff calls, "don't remove it until I get a shot. I may want to tie a trapped sable in with the picture."

He brings up the camera, straightens out the tripod, then gets the focus. It's a close-up and he does a little measurin' before he's satisfied. Somewhere one hell of a piece of ice lets go and the roar sounds like an earthquake, even if it's muffled by distance. As the last echo dies down, Kupoff commences grindin'. Somethin' whistles past my ear and thuds. Kupoff's hand, turnin' the crank, freezes and his head jerks back until the light's shinin' on it. There's surprise and a hard glitter in his eyes. And there's a shaft of clean, white wood protrudin' from his breast, and the feathers on the end of the shaft quivers.

Kupoff's legs buckle, his fingers paw at the shaft, then he crashes down behind the camera. He'd been playin' with primitive emotions, stirrin' up the worst in

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men, then gettin' it down on film, but he misses the biggest scene of all. His own death. We drop for cover, but no second arrow comes.

Moxchuck Jim stumbles out of the brush and he's holdin' a newly made bow and strange animal whimpers comes from his throat. He drops down to his knees and turns the sable loose and watches it limp away—watches it with eyes that look like they was goin' to pop right out of his head. Then it's all clear enough. The camera is the evil eye he's been talkin' about. He's afraid of it and he's afraid of Kupoff, too, so he goes off and makes himself a bow and arrow. He thinks that sable's got his brother's spirit in it, and when he kills Kupoff he's savin' his brother.

"Poor cuss!" Hawk Dow mutters. "I never thought his fear would take a turn like this." One of Bullock's men shudders and the Muskrat twists his hands nervous-like. The whole business is gettin' them. That arrow didn't make any noise. It just came and stopped in a man's heart.

It got Bullock, too. He's kinda pale in the face, but the hand holdin' the automatic is steady enough. "Clear out!" he yells. "Everybody except you." And he orders the Muskrat to one side.

He's so shaky there's no tellin' what'll happen and we scampers like rabbits to a point beyond accurate shootin' then turns and watches. Bullock brings Moxchuck Jim to his feet with a kick and starts him towards the river.

The Muskrat has to step across Kupoff's body. He hesitates, then jumps and looks back. "One less mouth," he says and his voice sounds like his teeth was chatterin'.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAMAN'S CURSE

BULLOCK drives his gun into Moxchuck's back and starts him toward the river. A breeze comin' off the land blows fog from the glaciers down on us. It's like the damp breath of death itself. For a few seconds I don't catch what Bullock's up to, then it dawns on me.

"He's goin' to drive him into Sable River," I says to Wolf Dow.

Moxchuck realizes it about the same time, and he turns and pleads with Bullock. The man keeps drivin' the muzzle of the automatic into his stomach and tellin' him to go on. Once or twice he stumbles and nearly goes down. Somewhere upstream, where the glacier's gougin' out the mountain, several thousand tons of boulders fall. They sound different than ice, and we're gettin' so we can tell 'em.

Moxchuck stops dead in his tracks on the edge of the stream and his swarthy face is a greenish-orange color. Bullock's men are standin' in a group, watchin' what's goin' on. A Indian don't mean a thing to them. But it does to Hawk. "Curse you, Bullock," he says, "I'm just goin' to take a chance on that gun of yours. I licked you once, and by God . . ." He starts and I can see Bullock's hand tightenin' on the gun butt. His trigger-finger grows tense and I figgers to jump him a split second before he pulls the trigger, throw him off balance and maybe give Moxchuck and Hawk a chance to close in.

Hawk's eyes narrow until they're only slits, he's set for the crouch, then Rita steps up close. I figger she's goin' to plead with him. Instead she cracks him behind the ear with a smooth stone she's got in the palm of her hand. He grunts, tumbles onto his face and never moves.

"Maybe you'd like some of the same?" Bullock says to me.

"I'm plumb peaceful," I answers.

"Then get back," he orders.

I looks at Rita, standin' there with the rock in her hand, her eyes on the three of us, then I glances at Moxchuck. The gun muzzle's makin' a dent between his ribs.

"I'm givin' you a chance," Bullock sneers. "This curse business is all foolishness. You're strong and tall, Moxchuck. Wade the river and you're free."

I can tell Moxchuck would sooner die. He's all shot—no nerves left. I'm so interested in waitin' for the break I'm expectin' Moxchuck to make that I hardly

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feel the rock I'm standin' on shake like a railroad train was goin' through a tunnel underneath.

"Get in there," Bullock repeats, "or I'll . . . I'll . . . catch that sable that's packin' 'round your brother's soul and . . ."

He didn't need to say no more. Moxchuck's head went up in sudden pride. The blood of fierce chiefs is in his veins and here's one time that blood tells. He picks up a pole, like we always use when crossin' a glacier stream, and starts across. He's near waist deep when he digs the pole in for the first time, and the current's tuggin' at him with a thousand fingers. Then he stops a moment and looks at me and yells over his shoulder somethin' in dialect that just about knocks me eye out. With that he wades out deeper.

His teeth chatters, but it's from the cold, not fear. Bullock's men look at each other. They're all thinkin' about the Russian *shaman's* curse—that anybody tryin' to cross that stream dies. They're rememberin' that a stronger man than Jim, Crimp Morten, died.

It's slow work. Each time he moves the stick it looks as if the current would sweep him off'n his feet. He don't dare move until he gets the stick set again. I'm watchin' and thinkin' what I'd just heard in dialect when suddenly it happens. He simply goes under like a underwater hand had grabbed him and hauled him below.

The stick, still in his hand, moves downstream, with the bottom end in the foggy air. He's still alive and fightin' nobody knows what. Then suddenly the stick floats along on the surface, goin' 'round and 'round in the little eddies. And there ain't no hand holdin' it any more.

A HUNDRED feet below us his shoulders are awash, then they go under again. We starts movin' along the bank and when we're near the bar littered with stranded boulders and ice we wait. It's ten minutes before what we're waitin' for drifts into the shallows and strands. It's Moxchuck Jim's remains and they look like Crimp Morten's.

A couple of the boys start diggin' a grave on the knoll and Bullock turns to me. "What'd he say in dialect just before he went under?" he asks.

"I couldn't understand," I answers. "He was pretty scared and talked in a new dialect to me."

"You're a liar!"

"Then what did he say?" I asks, "you know as many dialects as I do, except some of the Arctic tribes."

"That's just it," he says, "I think he spoke in one of the Arctic dialects." He looks at me hard a long time, but I ain't makin' things worse for myself by tellin' him what I heard. Then he walks back to where Rita's settin' watchin' Hawk regain his senses.

She looks up quick and there's a faint smile on her face. "Well," she says in a low, throaty voice, "you once said in the Ice Age people married for convenience and love came later."

"Yes," he says quick, and there's a pretty terrible hunger in his voice. "You've thought it over and are ready to answer my question."

"Didn't I answer it?" she asks.

"Meanin' when you hit Hawk?" he asks.

"What do you think?" she says. "He was about to jump you, wasn't he? And Mr. No-Shirt McGee was all set to take a hand in the affair, not to mention Moxchuck Jim. Here's a girl, in case you're interested, who knows which side of the bread her butter's on."

"You'll find butter on both sides as long as you string with me," he says.

Hawk sets up and shakes his head. It's easy to see he's dizzy and don't know what happened. I've got a sayin' that most usually makes the goin' easier when I'm in a jam. It's this: "When it looks like Dame Fortune was stackin' the cards again' you, maybe she's only helpin' you play out a bad hand." That's consoled me many a time, but it don't help none now. I'm beginnin' to wish Sad-Eye Susy was around. More'n once she's helped out in a pinch.

Hawk Dow has one hell of a headache the rest of the day and the Muskrat, re-

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memberin' Moxchuck and Kupoff are both dead, keeps mutterin', "Two less mouths! Two less mouths!"

It's gettin' under the hides of the remainin' Bullock men. I can see that. They had tried to frame up on him once and they figgered he wasn't forgettin' it and it gave 'em a lot of worry, as long as he had the gun.

Bullock and Rita sets by the fire and talks a long time that night. I'm busy, puttin' cold cloths on Hawk's head and don't catch much of what they're sayin'. But I do know she hit him a hard clout and he's still dizzy.

She turns in around midnight and Bullock goes up to his hole in the rocks where the Muskrat stands guard. I'm dozin' when I hear a rustlin' sound. It ain't much of a noise because the glaciers never let up their roarin' and thunderin'. I takes a look and it's the Bullock men. They head into the brush and I wait for somethin' to happen, figgerin' my situation can't get any tougher.

NOTHIN' happens and pretty soon I'm asleep. The Muskrat's squawkin' wakes me up. He's just discovered five men are missin'. Bullock comes tumblin' down, gun in hand, and nerves tighter'n a drum. He ain't forgotten Moxchuck Jim made a bow and arrow and killed Kupoff. He's half expectin' one of the missin' men might've made some kind of weapon.

"Where are they?" he asks.

"Don't look at me," I says. "I ain't no magician so they ain't up my sleeve."

"You're gettin' too funny," he snarls, then orders everybody to walk ahead of him. Me and Hawk leads off and the Muskrat follows. Bullock and Rita are right behind. My backbone tickles like. I'd sooner have Bullock in front. He still has a hunch I lied when I claimed I didn't understand Moxchuck Jim's last words.

We stumble onto a place in the sand where the five men had launched a heavy raft. "So they was buildin' a raft when they was supposed to be trappin' sable?" Bullock says.

"You've got to admit prospects in Sable Valley weren't very promisin' for men without a gun," I suggests.

He snarls at me again and hurries us along. We're within two hundred yards of the bar where bodies strand when I spots a figure sprawled on the bank, with his feet still in the water. It's a man named Ollard and he's alive.

Bullock kicks him in the ribs and he groans and opens his eyes. He's pretty well used up and blue with the cold. He starts to whisper somethin' and I drops down beside him. All at once I get a vibration in my knees, which are on rock. It's like a heavy train runnin' through a tunnel. "Trains have been runnin' most of the night," Ollard whispers.

"What happened to your raft?" I asks.

"We figgered five strong men could pole it across," he answers, "before the current could carry it downstream. Somethin' grabbed the poles out of our hands before we were a third of the way across. The raft starts spinnin' and I know it's goin' to hit stranded ice and break up, so I start swimmin' back. Vernon follows. The sand fills my clothes and I'm almost under when I reach the bank. That's all, except . . . The Russians put a curse on anybody who tries to cross that river all right."

What Ollard says comes out weak and I pass it along to Bullock's who's too wise to kneel down and maybe get jumped from behind. We drag the poor devil to a spot where the sun will hit him if the fog ever lifts, then hunt Vernon. He's alive, but shakin' with the cold and too weak to crawl, so up he goes to a dry spot. "Drag 'em over here," Hawk says, "and I'll build a fire. That is, unless you want 'em to die?" he adds, lookin' at Bullock.

Bullock don't say a word, so Hawk goes ahead. Me and the Muskrat does the heavy work. Bullock waits, gun in hand, until the job's done, then he motions us downstream again. We find the raft. It's mostly shattered pieces, but there's only one body. It looks as if life had been clubbed out of it. "Where're the other two?" I asks.

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"The men were probably in the middle of the stream when they let go of the raft," Hawk says, "and were carried away." He points to the fissure in the big cliff where the stream is sucked underground.

"Back to camp," Bullock orders. "We'll leave Vernon and Ollard where they are."

"Good idear," I thinks, "let 'em come in under their own power. I don't feel like packin' 'em."

ME and Hawk walks ahead, then the Muskrat and Bullock waits for Rita to catch up. His arm goes around her waist and she smiles and snuggles close. She's slim and graceful and her figger seems to kinda melt into his side. Her arm goes around his neck and she looks up and smiles. "You're much nicer than I ever dreamed you could be," she says. "But I'd be much happier if we were out of this valley."

"We're going to be out of this valley," he promises.

Hawk looks back and her lips curl in a kind of contempt. "Damn Kupoff," he says, "he fed us this Ice-Age stuff and caused so much conflict he's left his mark on all of us. Even Rita. And I've have sworn she wouldn't slip back."

"You never can tell about a woman," I says.

"Don't you start knockin' her, No-Shirt."

"And you can never tell about a man."

The breeze blowin' over the ridge from the sea eases up and the wet pea-soup fog that's been tryin' to make up its mind what to do starts settlin' fast. "Slow down," Bullock orders. "I want to keep you men in sight."

You can't walk fast and hug a girl at the same time and Bullock don't figger to let go of Rita now she's in the mood for a little squeezin'.

We stop and suddenly Rita says, "Quick, Hawk!" We whirl in our tracks. Her arm that's been hangin' round his neck has dropped down and caught his wrist. She's wrapped her body around his and is tryin' desperate to get the gun away from him. He's as strong as a bull and the best she can hope to do is to ruin his aim. I jumps the Muskrat figgerin' to keep him out of the play, and we go down.

The Muskrat's yaller. But he's cornered and yaller critters fight when they're cornered. He's all arms, legs, feet and knees. I ain't the man I used to be, and some times I think I never was. I'm havin' my hands full, when he throws out a foot and trips Hawk.

Down he goes and then Bullock does a queer and smart trick. He drops the gun he's been tryin' to hang onto. It's twenty feet from Hawk's hand and he tries to make a headlong dive for it. With both hands free Bullock picks Rita up, holds her above his head a second then hurls her down on Hawk. As she hits, Bullock dives for the gun.

He straightens up and there's a nasty smile around his lips. He knows now what the rest of us didn't savvy before, either. When Rita knocked Hawk in the head she done it to stop him from goin' into Bullock's hot lead. She's been playin' a game from the first to get that gun. And she done it so well she not only fooled Bullock, but me and Hawk, too.

And now she's sprawled in a crumpled, gaspin' heap across Hawk's shoulders and just when I'm beginnin' to get the best of the Muskrat I find myself lookin' into the muzzle of that automatic pistol. The longer I look the bigger the bore gets.

"Turn him loose," Bullock orders.

"You're still the boss," I answers, "but you can't blame a man for tryin'."

The Muskrat squirms from my unlovin' arms and stands ready to do anything Bullock says. Bullock aims the automatic pistol at Hawk's head, but he don't pull the trigger. He's got a better idear and wants to have some fun. "Not the river!" Hawk pleads. "Go ahead and shoot, but don't drive me in there."

HAWK gets to his knees and turns to help Rita up. Bullock waves him back. "I'll take care of her," he says.

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Hawk hesitates until he realizes Bullock is ready to let him have it, then he backs up several feet, but his eyes are pinpoints and he's all set to grab any kind of an openin' that shows up. But none shows.

Bullock's heavy boot swings out and settles down on Rita's throat. She looks at him and there ain't any fear in her eyes. She's a trouper all right. I could see she figgered she'd made her play, lost, and there wasn't any sense in whinin'.

"Take your choice," Bullock says to Hawk, "cross the river or I'll ruin your girl's pretty little throat."

"It's murder!" Rita pants. "And you know it is! He'll die out there."

"As Kupoff would've said, a lot of murderin' was done in the Ice Age," Bullock answers. "Are you goin' Dow, or must I—" He applies the pressure of his boot, then lifts it.

"Don't go, Hawk," Rita pleads. "Listen, Bullock, I'll make a bargain with you."

"No, you won't!" Hawk snarls, turnin' white.

"I'll marry you," Rita says. "Only let him go. He'll give up all claim to the sables, to everything . . ."

"*I'm* makin' the bargains around here," Bullock says. "All of 'em." He looks at Hawk. "I'm goin' to count twenty," he says.

Hawk doesn't wait for him to start countin'. He goes into the stream on the dead run and dives. In a few seconds his head comes up and Bullock fires. A jet of water leaps up a foot from Hawk's head. He dives again. We all watch the river and I keep my eye fixed on a little piece of ice floatin' near where he went down. The ice floats slowly and disappears into the fog downstream a minute after Hawk goes under. Nothin' comes up except bubbles.

"He's gone!" Rita moans. "He's gone!"

"One less mouth," the Muskrat mutters.

Bullock's eyes are narrowed again as he looks at me. "No-Shirt," he asks softly, "can you swim?"

"I can't swim a stroke," I answers.

There's no mirth to his smile as he looks at me. "You'll never learn any younger," he says, "let's see how far you can go before you sink."

"I can't swim," I says, "but there ain't a man in the North any better with a skinnin' knife than I am. I know how to take care of raw furs, 'specially sable."

"I hadn't thought of that," he says. "I'm going to need a few men to take care of the trapping. Stand over there by Rita."

I know it's a reprieve, not a pardon, that he's given me. When he's through trappin' sable I'll walk the plank. But hope is eternal, as the feller says, and I'm hoping maybe after all Dame Fortune is helpin' me play a bad hand. And I ain't given up all hope of Sad-Eye Susy showin' up. She knows I'm in the Indian Bay country.

Suddenly Rita breaks free and starts runnin' downstream. "You can shoot me if you want to," she cries over her shoulder, "but I'm going down and find out what happened to him. He may be . . . alive."

"Let her go," Bullock says. "She won't find anything. And she'll have to come back." I was wonderin' about that. I was afraid she might let the river have her, too. And why not when you stop to think about it? A future with Wolverine Bullock wasn't very temptin' to a high-minded girl.

CHAPTER IX

BALED GOLD

I HEADS back to camp. I'm pretty blue, take it all in all. I liked Hawk Dow. Many a man would have gone off half-cocked and been shot down early in the fight, but Hawk knew how to hang onto his temper. He figgered there was no percentage in playin' Bullock's game. I had a hunch when he'd set by the campfire, stare at the blaze and never say a word or even move for minutes at a time that he was huntin' for a logical answer to that supposed curse on the river. But now . . .

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The fog hung on for hours. Shortly after noon Ollard and Vernon stumbled into camp. Their arms and legs were black and blue and each of 'em had gashes around the head. "What yanked your poles out of your hands," I asked them, "when you tried to cross on a raft?"

Neither of 'em had an answer. Somethin' just whipped the poles from their hands and that was all there was to it. You could see their superstitious streaks was beginnin' to scare 'em. Towards the middle of the afternoon I went over and talks turkey to Bullock. "I'm goin' down and find why Rita don't come back. And if you want to put a bullet through my spine, hop to it. You'll stop me, and you'll also lose a good trapper."

He doesn't answer and I don't wait. I run most of the way, keepin' an eye on the eddies behind the blocks of stranded ice. Things float in eddies. Rita's settin' on the bar, watchin' the water and waitin' the way folks do when they're expectin' somethin' will happen they don't want.

She's tense and dry-eyed and doesn't say a word until I put my hand on her arm, then she suddenly turns and begins sobbin' on my shoulder. "I loved him so," she says over and over again.

While I'm tryin' to think of the right words to say I hear the freight train go through the underground tunnel again.

"There's that rumble," she says. "This country never lets up, does it? The roar of the glaciers is always in my ears, day and night. Sometimes I want to hold my head and scream, Stop! Stop! Stop!"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't do much good," I says, "this has been goin' on thousands of years."

"I sat here and watched ice sucked into that fissure," she says. "There must be a great hole in the ridge. It swallows up a whole river."

"It's quite a hole," I admit, watchin' a fairish ice berg disappear in one gulp. "The river has filled a small bay beyond the ridge with dirt, boulders and muck."

"I thought how easy it would be to jump in and let the water take me to him," she went on to say. "I'd just close my eyes and in a few minutes it would be over. But from the first I've tried to be a good soldier. I thought you might try again to outsmart Bullock and I could help. I failed rather wretchedly, didn't I?"

"You was a hundred percent successful," I explains, "it was the Muskrat's foot trippin' Hawk that spoiled everything."

"With Ollard and Vernon out of it," she said, "it looked as if we had a chance." She was silent a while, then asks, "What did Moxchuck Jim tell you in dialect?"

"He tells me Kupoff lit the fuse and blew up the snow bridge on Blue Glacier," I answers.

"Impossible!" she exclaims. "He couldn't . . ." Then she thinks a minute or two. "Yes, to test the emotions of humans cut off from the world, he would do anything. I didn't realize it until we were on the boat coming north. He harped so on the subject I thought him a little extreme. I believe the man was partly insane."

"And by killing four men there were just that many less mouths to feed," I points out. "Besides, you'll remember Kupoff was the one near the camera and the one who done the crankin' when the bridge broke up."

"That is true. What else did Moxchuck tell you?"

"He said the Muskrat fell asleep and while he slept Bullock sneaked past him, crawled up and knocked the cameraman in the head with a rock. The poor devil was carryin' the torch of revolt again' the dictator," I says, "and Bullock had to stop it quick. He got past the Muskrat again and next mornin' the Muskrat swore he was awake all night."

"I wonder if the Muskrat dozes these days?" she says.

"I don't think so. You'll notice Bullock makes him get plenty of sleep every day," I answers. "He ain't takin' no chances on the Muskrat dozin' again." I takes her arm. "I guess you'd like to rest and try and forget this whole business?"

"I can't rest," she answers, "and I'll never forget. If the glaciers would just

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stop for a moment. If everything could just be peaceful and quiet, it would be heaven on earth."

Bullock don't say a word when she returns. He just looks at her and shakes his head in a sneerin' kind of way and what's in his eyes ain't pleasant for her to read.

THERE ain't much said around the campfire that night. We seem to have busted up into pairs—Bullock and the Muskrat; Ollard and Vernon; me and Rita. But Bullock's got the gun.

Just before time to turn in he gets to his feet. "You hate my guts, all of you," he says, "and I know it. I'm goin' to drive the guts out of you from now on. And that goes for you too, you . . ." What he called Rita can't be put down.

"I'm going to kill him," she whispers, "if it's the last thing I do. I never thought anything could make me want to kill . . . ever. Wouldn't Kupoff love it if he could see what his precious little setup has done to me?" A second later, she wanted to cry because forces too big for her to handle are breakin' down all that's fine in her.

A kinda terrible silence settles down on the camp and pretty soon Bullock says, "Go to bed."

We went.

He wakes us up at daybreak and tells Rita to get breakfast. As soon as we've finished he starts us out on the trap-lines. Rita stays in camp to do the cookin' and such. It's plain to see Bullock's goin' to make sure of the fur first, then take his different kinds of revenge later on.

Day after day he drives us and still there don't seem to be any less sable. We skin 'em near the trap and go on to the next, tossin' the remains nearby. Gulls commence to gather and there's a few extra eagles around to take care of the sable meat.

At night, when we're too cussed tired to move, we have to salt and make up the pelts into bales. Baled, gold, they are and no less. When we've taken twelve hundred sable, the daily catch begins to fall off a little. Not much—just enough to notice.

"Twelve hundred pelts," Bullock says one night, "two hundred and forty thousand dollars worth figured at two hundred dollars a skin. Get me another twelve hundred."

"You're a fool," I says, "if you don't overtrap you can take fur out of this valley as long as you live."

"Gettin' tired of bein' drove," he sneers. "I'll chance overtrappin'. Get me twelve hundred more pelts."

We've got fifteen hundred and something happens. Maybe sable are smart and commence to know what a trap is. I don't know the answer, except trappin' gets mighty tough. Bullock rages and blusters. We're so tired we don't care whether he finishes us off with his automatic or not.

On a Friday night I turns in so tired I'll bet a glacier blowin' up couldn't wake me. For a minute I look across at Rita in her sleepin' bag. She's lost weight and color and there're gray, exhausted lines around her mouth. "The biggest thing in her life's gone out of it," I say, "and she'll slip fast from now on. That girl's a one-man woman." She smiles sad like and I drops off with her expression hauntin' me.

Pretty soon I'm dreamin' Hawk's body comes out of the water. It ain't human, but just part of a gray fog comin' down from the glaciers. His hand reaches out and drops across my mouth. It's colder'n death, and it's wet. I can feel the fingers. I tries to yell and nothin' happens. Suddenly I'm awake. I'd have yelled, only there's a hand on my mouth and Hawk's form, mixed with the gray fog, is there. He's wet and cold—as a ghost would be that'd left a glacier stream.

"BE ready, No-Shirt," he whispers. Then he's gone. I'm still tryin' to figger out whether it's a bad dream or somethin' that really happened, when I notice a puddle of glacier water on my sleepin' bag.

"It's no dream," I says and takes a quick look at Vernon and Ollard. I manage to get out of my sleepin'-bag without makin' any noise, then looks around for a

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weapon. There ain't no axe, because each night Bullock takes the axe and all the cookin' and skinnin' knives to bed with him. There's a twenty-pound boulder, though. I crouch with it in my arms and watch the spot where Bullock's sleepin'.

Fog drifts across and I can't see a thing. It's gettin' twilight and I curse the fog. It thins, and I see that drippin' ghost again, crawlin' amongst the rocks, twenty feet above the Muskrat. The Muskrat's been dozin' but he's got a hunch danger's close. He shifts around uneasily and stares down on the camp. Probably he counts the sleepin' figgers and is wonderin' where I am. Suddenly Hawk swings down to a ledge fifteen feet above the Muskrat. Then he jumps. His feet hits the Muskrat across the shoulders and knocks him off his perch. He lets out a queer cry, like a startled animal as he starts rollin'. At the same instant Hawk whirls and pounces on Bullock.

The Muskrat's howl wakes the whole camp. Rita is out of her sleepin'-bag and askin' questions before she's really awake. Vernon and Ollard start comin' out, but I'm standin' over them with the twenty pound boulder. "The first one who moves gets it!" I warns. "And you might do a little serious figgerin' while you're stayin' quiet. Hawk's back. Him and Bullock are havin' it out up there. If he wins, you've got a chance to live. If he loses, there's no tellin' what Bullock will do to you."

Rita's rubbin' the sleep of exhaustion from her eyes and tryin' to clear her brain. Suddenly she catches the meanin' of my words. "No-Shirt," she yells, and something in her voice brings a lump to my throat. "It's Hawk! He's back! I don't know what's happened, but he's alive!"

At that moment she catches sight of the Muskrat. Fear and not courage is makin' him scramble up that bank again to give Bullock a hand. Rita streaks across the ground, jumpin' boulders and shrubs. She fairly soars up the bank and catches the Muskrat's right leg. Then she turns and starts runnin' and she's got a down-hill haul.

The Muskrat hollers bloody murder and pretty soon he ain't hollerin'. His head's banged again' a rock and he's out cold. She drops him beside Vernon and takes my boulder. "Quick," she says. "Help Hawk."

Bullock's perch is about thirty feet long and eight feet wide, well littered with broken slabs of rock. Imagine a pair of wolverines stagin' a finish fight in a place like that. They're movin' so fast I can't get a crack at Bullock without maybe hittin' Hawk.

"The gun!" Hawk yells. "I kicked it over the edge just now. Get it and cover the others. I want to finish this buzzard single-handed."

The gun's the most important thing and I commences pawin' over loose rock where it might've lodged. I can't find a thing and suddenly Hawk and Bullock break. Hawk's fist catches him flush on the jaw and Bullock goes down. He rolls to the edge and should've stopped, but he didn't. He starts to roll over and for a split second I can see his neck is stiff and his gaze is fixed on a heap of boulders half way down the slope.

THE gun's there and he knows it. I start for the spot, but Hawk's faster. He jumps over Bullock, digs in his heels and stops near the boulders. Bullock rolls over a couple of times, lands on his feet and streaks it for the river.

His move is clear enough now. He figgers if Hawk can cross that river twice and live, then he can do it once. He knows he's got more brute strength and it's his boast he can do anything any other man does. I grabs his legs when he's ten yards from the water. Down he goes, but he bounces up and swings on my jaw. I ain't as fast on the dodge as I used to be and I catches a glancin' blow that starts the aurora borealis lightin' up the fog. I'm on my knees when he hits the stream. And I can feel another freight train comin' through the tunnel under the river.

Hawk races up and he's got Bullock's gun in his hand. He tries to yell somethin' but he's too winded, and there's too much noise from the glaciers for Bullock to hear.

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Bullock's drivin' through, his eyes set on the other shore with its strip of river bed and wall of ice. If he can make that strip of rock, then he can worm along to the end of the ice and maybe get over the ridge to Indian Bay.

He's halfway across and Hawk mutters, "By golly, he's goin' to make it."

Suddenly he shudders and stops, as if somethin' had grabbed his leg, then he goes under. He ain't sucked under exactly. He goes down fast, and he don't come up again. I'm still on my knees, starin', when I realizes the freight train that's been goin' through the tunnel has gone on and it's quiet again.

"Take this gun," Hawk says to me, "and let anybody have a slug that even looks at you cross-eyed. I'll be back, Rita," he adds, then before the girl can stop him, he plunges into the river. He swims and swims hard on the surface, lettin' the current carry him along, makin' no attempt to fight it. He's lost in the fog and we don't see him for three hours. I'm beginnin' to fear the worst when I spots him swimmin' back, far upstream, lettin' the current carry him towards us. He's pretty much all in and I hands Rita the gun and wades out. He's got a cod-line tied to his belt, and when he gets his wind, we start haulin' it in. Pretty soon there's a larger rope comes and fin'ly a line as thick as your thumb spannin' the river.

Hawk looks at Ollard, Vernon and the Muskrat. "You men get out a raft," he orders. "And you watch 'em, No-Shirt."

"Sure," I answers, "but where'd you get all the line?"

"When I knew Bullock was all set to kill me," Hawk explains, "I took a big dive and started downstream . . ."

"How come the curse didn't drag you under like it done the others?" I asks.

"That, my dear No-Shirt, is something it took me a long time to figure out. But I had the answer when I went into the river," he says. "I landed before the river sucked me into the fissure and for once I blessed the fog. Everybody believed I was dead."

"And Rita did, too," I says.

"Yes, I know," he admits, "but everything happened so fast I couldn't explain to anyone. I got over the ridge, built a fire and dried out. After the fog lifted I could see a canoe in Indian Bay. It was one of the old-type war-canoes, such as the early day Northern Indians used in their raids on the Puget Sound tribes. There was an old woman and half dozen kids manning the craft."

"What kind of a old woman?" I asks.

"A wrinkled squaw with all her teeth missin' except an upper and lower on each side of her mouth," he answers. "She reminded me of a cat fish laughing. She's got deep lines on her face and a bashed-in nose. She whistles when she breathes. Her hair is black, streaked with silver and she's got sad eyes. She's lookin' for a cuss named No-Shirt McGee who's disappeared in the glacier country."

"Sad-Eye Susy!" I yells.

"Knowin' plenty of rope would be needed in the glacier country, she brought it along," he says.

"She's never failed me in a pinch yet," I says. "The gratitude of a Indian is a fine thing. I saved her seventh and favorite husband's life once and she's never forgot it."

"She's waitin' to take us to the nearest steamer port," Hawk says.

I HAS my hands full supervisin' the raft the others are buildin', but when it's finished I joins Hawk and Rita at the fire. They're settin' close together, gettin' a sip from the cup of happiness that's comin' their way at last. "We'll give No-Shirt enough money to last him the rest of his life," Hawk is sayin', "and we'll take the rest and develop some placer ground I know of. I don't believe in takin' money out of a country and not puttin' some of it back in for further development. We'll buy Sable Valley from the government and carry on a fur business on the side. You'll have to quit your motion-picture job, of course. I'm an old-fashioned mug, Rita, and I like to have my

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wife around me—not thousands of miles away."

"I guess I'm old-fashioned, too," she murmurs, "so old-fashioned that I went back to the Ice Age and felt like killing Bullock with my own hands."

He holds her in his arms a long time and I says, "Ahem!" but they don't hear me. "Hey, you cooin' doves," I yells. And they hear that. "The raft's done."

Ollard, Vernon and the Muskrat floats the raft down to the rope and then pack the baled gold down and put it on board. They can see there ain't room for them and look plenty worried. Hawk looks at 'em a long time. "I really should bump you off," he says, "or make you wade the river and let the Russian *shaman's* curse do its work. You're to leave Alaska as soon as you are out of the valley, and if you ever show up again, I'll bring murder charges against you. You understand?"

They nodded and looked worried.

"Pay out the fish-line," Hawk says, "as we cross the river. When we're on the other side I'll cut the raft free and you can haul the rope in and build another for yourselves. I'll send a fishing boat to pick you up in Indian Bay."

They understands and Hawk takes a final look around. "I guess we're all ready," he says.

"Except for one thing," Rita says, "Jake Silvertone will want the camera and film." She smiled shyly at Hawk Dow. "After all," she adds, "it's hard to forget I was born a trouper."

"I hope you never forget it," Hawk says while the others scramble to bring the film aboard. Then Hawk shoves off.

The current catches us and water breaks over the upper edge of the raft, but all the time the rope fastened to the ice is pullin' us towards the other bank. "Just what, Hawk," I asks, "is this Russian curse that kept natives out of the country for years and took the lives of white men right and left since we've been here?"

"Just as I claimed," he answers, "all legends have some basis of fact behind them. No doubt several of the early Russians were killed on Sable River. They investigated and learned the reason, then cashed in on it. Several natives, taking the story with a grain of salt, tried their luck and died. The legend of the curse was established. The river bottom along here is steep and comparatively smooth. The water moves swiftly, but a man could wade it with the aid of a pole. The trouble is, his pole is snatched from his hand."

"What does it?" I asks.

"Boulders rolling over the bottom and invisible in the muddy water. They shatter the pole or pile up against a man's foot, pin it to the bottom, drag him down and go over him like a steam roller," Hawk explains. "I spent days figuring out the curse and connecting it up with the noise that sounded like subway trains. And boulders proved the only answer. The answer, of course, was to swim, keep your feet up and not try to find bottom. Finding bottom was what trapped the others who tried to swim the river."

Something struck the raft, partly lifted it, then dropped it again. For a second or two we could see the top of a mighty boulder awash with foam, then it was gone.

Rita tumbled forward, her hands clutching at Hawk's shirt. "Darling, I'm scared," she wails. "I didn't have time to be, before. But right now I'm frightened to death."

Hawk laughs that ripply, deep-down laugh of his. "We'll make it, honey," he says, real easy and confident-like.

The girl smiles. "It's so big and dreadful—and you licked it, Hawk. You licked the glacier and the valley and Kupoff and Bullock too." Then she giggles—just like an impish kid. "My hero!" she burbles. She may be kiddin' with her lips, but in her heart she means it.

I looked the other way. The friendly shore rushed forward to greet us. Behind us, the glaciers roared.

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THIS time of year, ordinarily confusing enough—what with trying to get the furnace going, to remember to take down the awnings which the howling and nocturnal winds of Connecticut are reducing to shreds and tatters, and in general to put the incoherent assembly of old shingles and pre-revolutionary timber that is Our House into Shape for the Winter—has been even more bedeviled by the outburst of activity among the office pixies.

The Amalgamated Limbs of Satan of North America, Local Number 73, have been holding their biennial nationwide convention at an abandoned WPA project in East Flatbush, discussing Ways and Means, and brooding in general over how to make Hallowe'en more trying than usual this year.

Ottokar, Hamilcar and Sam (we don't mention Dave any more; not since he had that baby down in Bermuda last year) returned to these precincts late last week, in a fine, big, sixteen-cylinder fettle. And ever since, they've been putting on an elaborate Dress Rehearsal for their big night of the year, ringing typewriter bells like mad, scribbling runic symbols over manuscripts, climbing into telephone receivers to deliver themselves of shrill incantations under the pretext of being that Author from Seattle. And such-like.

We really don't mean to complain, being, as a rule, more indulgent with the antic little fellows than a brand-new father with his first born he-child. But Saturday, before leaving the office, at great expenditure of mental effort we drew up a schedule for the November issues with which we were going to regale you this morning. However, one of our little darlings—we don't know which one, but we'll find out somehow—saw in that neat and shining schedule an opportunity for a fine display of his extremely peculiar genius. When we arrived this morning, a little breathless because of having successively missed the 7:12, the 7:38, the 8:14 and having caught the 8:27 only by the conductor's last whisker, said schedule was scattered all over the desk in a handsome, carefully shredded snow. We really hadn't seen anything like it since we were very young and our Aunt Mattie took us to see Way Down East—in a revival, of course.

We did find one comparatively undemolished corner of it, but all we could make out were the letters . . . *odor* . . . *sc.e* and *Bo* . . *e. C* . . *se.* Which weren't much help.

However, as far as we can remember, November is going to be a good month for all you lucky ARGOSY readers. There's going to be the new Lester Dent serial, *Genius Jones,* which we can only describe as a modern fable, smarter than Aesop, and more entertaining than almost anything. It's about a young man raised, approximately, on an iceberg. The sole survivor of an ill-fated Arctic expedition, he had been reared by natives and self-taught through the admirable but highly specialized expedition-library. Attaining manhood, he decides to see the world, and does so by thumbing a ride on a passing yacht. You'll like this Genius Jones fellow and you'll like the story of his spectacular encounter with what we moderns are pleased to call Civilization. Beginning November 27th.

And—well, let's see. Next week, of

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course, the heralded Borden Chase novel, *Sandhog,* a really important and unusually honest story of the world we all live in. On any reader's *must*-list.

There'll be novelets by L. Ron Hubbard, and H. Bedford-Jones; a really grand story about Old California by John K. Butler (November 20th), a Thibaut Corday tale by a fellow named Roscoe, and *West to Siberia* by Frank Richardson Pierce, an investigation into the youth of that most famous of all sourdoughs, No-Shirt McGee, culled from before the days he began to be known by his omission of that particular item of apparel. And short stories, prodigally strewn throughout the month, by Richard Sale, C. F. Kearns, Charles Tenney Jackson, Cornell Woolrich, Alexander Key and a host of other ARGOSY favorites.

Thanksgiving is also announced for the month of November—but we didn't have anything to do with that. . . .

Returning to the immediate present, we roll up our sleeve, plunge our muscular arm into the mailbag and come up with a letter from

MARIE GEIL

Congratulations on a much improved ARGOSY! The cover on the October 2nd issue is one of the most colorful you have had for some time. As a matter of fact, it was this cover that prompted me to purchase ARGOSY again. It had been more than a year since I read the magazine, and I sincerely mean it when I say you have a much better magazine now than you did a year or so ago.

I particularly enjoyed Frank Richardson Pierce's "Diamond Daisy's Fur Coat." This is the first "No-Shirt McGee" story I have read and now that I'm acquainted with "No-Shirt" I shall look forward to seeing him again in "Sable."

You have worked miracles with a heretofore dull and uninteresting Argonotes department. I like Leo Lawson Roger's poem, "To." It has a certain "ring" to it, don't you think, especially when it's set to music—

North Branch, N. Y.

Welcome back, Miss Geil. We're glad that if you find us changed it's for the better. We don't mention L . . L . . . . . R . . . . s any more, Miss Geil, but we do agree with you about his poem. No matter what our personal feelings about the fellow may be, we must admit him to undying greatness on the strength of that single powem. In fact, no contribution since has made much impression upon us, and we're fooling around with the idea of just letting the Poet's Corner pass into limbo. It has, we feel, already achieved its finest expression.

WILLIAM R. MELLER

Congratulations on your fine page 64 of the September 18th issue. Only good thing about it is that it ends the *Mike the Magnificent* story. Maybe, if luck holds, the whole series. However there wasn't one of those foul fishhook things that you usually put at the end of a story, at the end of it, so maybe it'll just go on and on. What those yarns really needed was someone to give Marlin a good, final, once-and-for-all bat over the head with, I'd suggest, the Taj Mahal, and grab the jools, and sink that little monstrosity, the kid himself—meaning little Mikuud—to the bottom of the Pacific.

I thought the swastikas were dandy. I suppose you're sick of veering between the Fascistic side (see *Strike*) and the Bolsheviks (see—if you're able—*Kingdom Come*) who find cossacks in every uniform and a potential revolution in every R.O.T.C. corps. The swastikas more or less settled things—or did they? And why the black one at the end instead of in the middle? And why the filler in two columns? And why the filler anyhow? Rubbish.

My advice to you: Stick to Adams and don't try to go political. It just makes you look silly. More good Chidsey and less of his lesser brain-children. And more careful supervision of the typographical side of your otherwise a-little-better-than-average-magazine.

Chelsea, N. J.

WE are responsible, Mr. Meller, for little Mikuud, and we'll fight for him at the drop of a hint, but we are *not* responsible for those little emblems on page 64 of the September 18th. The standard carried by the editors of ARGOSY has upon it neither the swastikas of Berlin, the fasces of Rome, nor the hammer and sickle of Moscow. We only print what we think will interest our readers and we read not sitting on a soap box, but in an ordinary chair—an uncomfortable grained-oak model that is getting rather hot lately. We have authors who cull the drama from the modern scene. They give it to us

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and we give it to you, not as an interpretative thesis, but as drama. If we wanted to draw a brief for ourselves we could, of course, defend the swastika as a decorative emblem—and an American emblem, since it was used by our own Navajo Indians. But we won't defend it, those three swastikas got into ARGOSY by some print-shop deviltry that we are not quite clear about. If we had had to choose a decoration for page 64 it would probably have been something without political significance like *fleurs de lis* or some innocuous little asterisks. Obviously a magazine with a torch to carry could not have published *Strike* and *Kingdom Come* in close succession. It is our—perhaps antiquated—idea that when fiction sounds a tocsin it ceases to be fiction. Writers who gnaw sociological bones have a very definite place, but not in the pages of ARGOSY, a magazine that does not publish articles.

LOOKING AHEAD!

SANDHOG

This isn't a melodrama. This isn't make-believe. This is an honest story, fearlessly told, of the men who labor beneath the world's mighty rivers—of their hopes, their courage, their constant laughter in the face of dread—and, finally, of what happens when a big-time racketeer of industry tries to muscle in on the world's squarest profession. Beginning an important, new, and exciting novel by

BORDEN CHASE

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For years, Lars Marlin nursed a grudge acquired in the penal colony at French Guiana. And when he finally met up with Paco, Lars thought his carefully nurtured hate would at last be appeased. But Paco had an heiress, and Paco had a yacht, and Paco had plans. . . . A complete novelet by

L. RON HUBBARD

OFT IN THE SILLY NIGHT

Some of us remember the days when we were singing "In My Merry Oldsmobile", and the sudden-rich were buying French châteaux and transplanting them in American suburbs. But they didn't all transplant the ghosts that went with them. A short story by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

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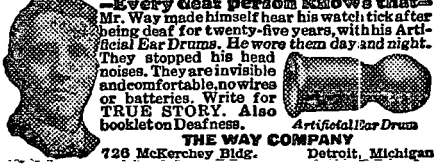

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